United Nations A/52/PV.53

General Assembly
Fifty-second Session

Official Records

53rd plenary meeting
Monday, 24 November 1997, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . . (Ukraine)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Kpotsra (Togo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 20

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Notes by the Secretary-General (A/52/270 and A/52/443)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/52/297, A/52/341, A/52/433, A/52/434, A/52/500, A/52/525, A/52/532, A/52/535, A/52/562, A/52/563, A/52/568 and A/52/678)

Draft resolutions (A/52/L.14, L.16, L.34, L.36, L.37)

(d) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/159)

(e) Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/586)

Draft resolution (A/52/L.32)

(f) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/537)

Draft resolution (A/52/L.33)

The Acting President: As announced previously, sub-item (c) of agenda item 20, entitled "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan", will be considered together with agenda item 43 at a later date.

I should like to inform the General Assembly that the Permanent Representative of Luxembourg, on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States, in a letter dated 10 October 1997, requests that the General Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the Observer of Switzerland during the debate on agenda item 20.

97-86575 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

Members will recall that in accordance with the established practice of the General Assembly, observer non-member States may normally make statements only in the Main Committees. However, following consultations, it is proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear a statement by the Observer of Switzerland in the course of the debate on agenda item 20?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In connection with agenda item 20 (b), to date the Assembly has before it five draft resolutions: A/52/L.14, entitled "Special assistance for the economic recovery and reconstruction of the Democratic Republic of the Congo"; A/52/L.16, entitled "Special economic assistance to central African countries receiving refugees"; A/52/L.34, entitled "Assistance for the reconstruction and development of El Salvador"; A/52/L.36, entitled "Assistance for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon"; and A/52/37, entitled "Emergency assistance for the economic recovery and reconstruction of Burundi".

In connection with agenda item 20 (e), the Assembly has before it draft resolution A/52/L.32, entitled "Participation of volunteers, 'White Helmets', in activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development".

In connection with agenda item 20 (f), the Assembly has before it draft resolution A/52/L.33, entitled "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster".

I give the floor to the representative of Argentina to introduce draft resolution A/52/L.32.

Mr. Frigerio (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): At the outset, my delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his report on the "White Helmets" initiative [A/52/586]. The report clearly indicates the strength and quality of the commitment shown by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the unstinting support of the United Nations Volunteers programme. I take this opportunity also to pay tribute to the continuous, intelligent and dedicated cooperation of the Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers, Ms. Brenda Gael McSweeney, through whom we hail her colleagues in Bonn, in Geneva and in the many developing countries where national and international "White Helmets"/United Nations Volunteers have been serving the humanitarian cause.

My Government also thanks the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, with whose help and support the "White Helmets" have consolidated and expanded their efforts.

My delegation also expresses its special appreciation to the Governments of France, Germany and Italy for their generous support, which has enabled the initiative to expand in the past year in Angola and Haiti. We convey particular thanks to Government of Saudi Arabia for its generous contribution that made possible missions in Palestine, Lebanon and Rwanda.

We also thank the Governments of Afghanistan, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Brazil, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Chile, Cyprus, Ecuador, El Salvador, Georgia, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Madagascar, Monaco, Morocco, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Paraguay, Republic of Moldova, Romania, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey and Uruguay, which have joined my country in sponsoring draft resolution A/52/L.32, which it is my pleasure to introduce to the General Assembly.

As the Secretary-General notes in his report, the "White Helmets" initiative is clearly viable in its technical, financial and institutional aspects. This assessment encourages us to explore new ways to consolidate the achievements of the past three years and to make the most of the potential of the initiative, with the cooperation of the agencies of the United Nations system and the States participating in the initiative.

This draft resolution invites Member States to develop and strengthen their respective national volunteer corps to support humanitarian relief operations. Commitment of that kind, of course, requires joint efforts by Governments and non-governmental organizations and by civil society at large: the main source of the human resources that sustain volunteerism.

The draft resolution further invites the United Nations system to encourage increased participation by Member States in the decision-making process and in the implementation of humanitarian activities. Donor countries and specialized agencies must work together and in a complementary way. Recipient countries too

must join this dialogue in search of the same outcome: better and more timely aid delivery, with reduced administrative costs.

It is in this broader context that my delegation believes the draft resolution must be considered. Volunteerism has a fundamental role to play in strengthening the response capacity of the humanitarian system, and can at the same time provide Member States with a new quality-control system for humanitarian assistance, avoiding duplicated and overlapping efforts and contributions. We should create conditions that will encourage contributions on the basis of a better knowledge of operations and greater involvement of donor countries at the implementation phase in the field.

Forty countries are already involved in this initiative as donor or recipient countries or through active diplomatic support. Voluntarily and gradually, and in keeping with their respective capacities, Member States can supply the Secretary-General with one or several lists of teams of "White Helmet" volunteers slated to act in case of emergency, at the request either of the Secretary-General or of the agencies or programmes he designates as humanitarian assistance coordinators in a crisis situation. Here we think it important to consider appointing an officer to carry out liaison between national "White Helmet" focal points and the United Nations system.

The national humanitarian assistance "White Helmets" teams could be assigned by Member States or the Secretary-General to act in specific geographical areas or in specific emergencies, in a manner consistent with the approach of the contributing State and the various United Nations programmes. We would thus create a means of bringing together donors and recipients and ensuring prompt and efficient implementation of programmes, a mechanism permitting a better identification of the end use of the contributions. The institutions and programmes of the system would have more realistic data regarding the cost and availability of human resources for project implementation.

This scheme, together with several Argentine missions, has allowed for the successful participation of volunteers and "White Helmets" experts in the Middle East, Africa, Central America, Latin America and Central Asia, covering such needs as drinking water, monitoring of elections, assistance to displaced groups, provision of medical and food assistance and carrying out mine-clearance operations.

Of course, I would not wish to miss this opportunity to renew the invitation for new financial contributions to the "White Helmets" initiative, either through the United Nations Volunteers special window or through other trust funds. A higher level of contributions would allow for even further progress in broadening the initiative's international scope to cover other areas of the world and other humanitarian tasks.

We also think that this draft resolution makes it possible for the United Nations system and Member States to address the question of new sources of financing. In this respect, I am pleased to confirm that our Government will be contributing in the next few days an additional $1 million to the "White Helmets" special window.

Given the commitment we have all made, I hardly need to appeal for redoubled solidarity efforts. Nonetheless, I think this is a useful opportunity to demonstrate our conviction that not only can we show solidarity but also that we can be more efficient and more participatory, by encouraging and facilitating, through support for volunteer service, a greater involvement of civil society in the difficult task ahead.

In this respect, we welcome the Assembly's adoption of the resolution declaring 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers, which recognizes the significant contribution made by volunteers to the well-being and full realization of the aspirations to improve citizens' living conditions, with peace, development and human rights.

The "White Helmets", just like the "Blue Helmets" in the maintenance of peace and security, can give the Organization an effective multilateral tool to combat the scourges of violence, hunger, poverty and injustice.

The Acting President: Before calling on the next speaker, I should like to propose that the list of speakers in the debate on this item be closed at 4 p.m. this afternoon.

It was so decided.

The Acting President: I therefore request those representatives wishing to participate in the debate on this item to inscribe their names as soon as possible.

I now call on the representative of Ukraine to introduce draft resolution A/52/L.33.

Mr. Parashin (Ukraine) (*interpretation from Russian*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the delegation of Ukraine on agenda item 20 (f), "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster".

I am happy that, as the director of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, I have been given a rare opportunity to participate in this session of the General Assembly, which is of historic significance, and to discuss an issue of crucial importance to Ukraine — and not only to us, but to others as well.

More than 11 years have passed since the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster, but the problems generated have unfortunately not diminished. Its ecological and economic effects have been aggravated by socio-psychological consequences.

Dealing with the consequences has become a very heavy burden for Ukraine. By allocating 6 per cent of our State budget to heal the wound of Chernobyl, Ukraine has lost the opportunity to finance many other vitally important programmes for building an independent State, at a time when it is undergoing profound economic reforms.

Ukraine has agreed to decommission the Chernobyl nuclear power plant by the year 2000. This involves major measures which my country, unfortunately, does not have sufficient experience to carry out, and, more important, does not have the funds to carry out. Preparing to close the plant, with international cooperation, is only the initial phase of decommissioning it. It is also a serious social problem for the 6,000 personnel who have managed to secure the plant's safe operation during the 11 years since the accident occurred. In addition, the town of Slavutich, where the power plant personnel and their families live, has a population of 26,000 without support, and unemployment there is expected to reach 17 per cent by 1998.

A memorandum of understanding was signed on 20 December 1995 in Ottawa between the Government of Ukraine, the Governments of the G-7 nations and the European Union on closing the nuclear power plant. This offers real opportunities for cooperation in dealing with the Chernobyl problem.

Ukraine shut down power unit 1 in 1996, ahead of schedule, thereby demonstrating its genuine intention to fulfil its commitments under the memorandum of understanding. However, the global dimension of the task and the current economic crisis mean that Ukraine alone cannot carry the huge expense of solving the Chernobyl problem. A few days ago, on 20 November, a very important Chernobyl Shelter Pledging Conference on raising funds for a workers' shelter project was co-chaired by Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma and United States Vice President Albert Gore here in New York. This Conference proves yet again how serious the Chernobyl problem remains and the importance that countries attach to its solution.

Contributions were made during the Conference, and this means that very soon we can begin making a secure cover over this sleeping threat to global ecology, health and life itself. On behalf of the Ukrainian Government, I should like to take this opportunity to express gratitude to all those who took part in that Conference.

We cannot forget that it is impossible to solve the Chernobyl problem just by decommissioning the power plant. The United Nations inter-agency needs assessment mission which travelled to affected regions of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine last May reconfirmed the complexity of the problem. Having evaluated the situation in all three countries, it stressed the need for further substantial assistance in the areas of public health, socio-psychological rehabilitation, the environment, socio-economic issues and information. There is also a need to finance power capacity to offset Ukraine's losses resulting from decommissioning the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. In addition, there is the question of removing 200 tons of fuel-containing mass from the sarcophagus, because it is a serious ecological threat. As I have said, there is also the issue of social protection for the reduced personnel of the plant and the people of Slavutich, Ukraine's youngest city, where there is a concentration of major intellectual potential.

Chernobyl cannot be regarded as the problem of just one country or group of countries. This unprecedented technological catastrophe was man-made, but it remains a common human tragedy on a global scale. It continues to represent a serious problem not only for Ukraine and other affected countries, but for the international community as a whole.

We are deeply convinced that dealing with the aftermath of the disaster and resolving the whole spectrum of problems involved can be accomplished only through the joint effort of the entire international

community. Multilateral cooperation combining the intellectual and financial input of international organizations, international financial institutions and scientific and charitable funds is necessary to mitigate and minimize the consequences of the disaster. In this connection, I should like once again to express our great appreciation for the humanitarian efforts made by the organizations of the United Nations system in mitigating the after-effects of the disaster.

Eleven years have passed, but Chernobyl continues to challenge our technical, scientific and humanitarian thinking. The way in which the world community deals with this problem will show civilization's readiness to deal with tragedies on a global scale.

All nations share a common destiny. Present and future generations are truly striving to live in an ecologically safe environment, and we call upon all countries, international organizations and financial institutions to unite their efforts in implementing the programme to eliminate the severe consequences of Chernobyl and to prevent similar disasters.

As the Secretary-General emphasized in his report, implementation of the programme would translate into positive action the resolve and commitment expressed in many United Nations resolutions on Chernobyl which, regrettably, remain largely unfulfilled.

On behalf of the delegations of Belarus, Japan, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, I have the honour to introduce draft resolution A/52/L.33, entitled "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster". This document expresses concern about the long-term nature of the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear-power-plant disaster, which was a major technological catastrophe, and about the ongoing effects on the lives and health of people, in particular children, in the affected areas of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

The draft resolution takes into consideration the results of the United Nations needs-assessment mission to the affected areas in May this year, as well as the conclusions and recommendations of the United Nations-sponsored seminar, "Chernobyl and beyond: humanitarian assistance to victims of technological disasters", which was held in Moscow, also in May this year.

The draft resolution also requests the Secretary-General to continue his efforts in implementing the relevant General Assembly resolutions by using existing coordination mechanisms, in particular the United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl.

The draft resolution invites donor States, relevant financial institutions and other concerned parties of the international community, including non-governmental organizations, to continue to provide support to the efforts made by Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. Our document also welcomes the decision of the Heads of State and Government of the seven major industrial countries and the European Community, adopted at Denver in June 1997, regarding assistance in securing the environmental safety of the sarcophagus, and also welcomes the preparation of the inter-agency programme of international assistance to areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster. In addition, our draft resolution welcomes the convening by the United Nations of a special international meeting on Chernobyl to be held tomorrow, 25 November 1997, to generate further support for the populations of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

The draft resolution calls upon the United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl to continue his efforts to deal with the health, social, economic and ecological consequences of the Chernobyl disaster in the most seriously affected areas of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine on the basis of the inter-agency programme of international assistance to these areas.

We should like to express our gratitude to those delegations that have sponsored the draft resolution and to those that participated constructively in drafting it. We appeal to all delegations to support our draft resolution; their support is very important to us.

In conclusion, I should like to touch upon another important issue of great concern to my Government: the question of special economic assistance to countries whose economies have been affected by the negative effects of sanctions imposed by the Security Council on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The delegation of Ukraine believes that this issue should remain on the agenda of the United Nations, as earlier resolutions on the issue have not been properly

implemented — at least with respect to our country, which has not received any practical assistance to compensate for our enormous losses resulting from our consistent compliance with the sanctions regime. Let me remind the Assembly once again that Ukraine's losses amounted to some $5 billion, so we cannot agree with the view that, once the sanctions were lifted, there was no point in further considering the issue.

The crucial importance of this problem was confirmed last week in the Sixth Committee, which adopted by consensus a draft resolution entitled "Implementation of the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations related to assistance to third States affected by the application of sanctions".

Our delegation intends to introduce to the Assembly a draft resolution under agenda item 20 (b), on economic assistance to States affected by the implementation of Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

We sincerely hope for the understanding and the support of the Assembly.

Mr. Wolzfeld (Luxembourg) (*interpretation from French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union on the question of humanitarian assistance. The following countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union join in support of this statement: Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, as does the associated country of Cyprus.

Humanitarian assistance is a priority commitment of the European Union. In this connection, we attach particular importance to the coordination of such assistance within the United Nations system.

The coordination of humanitarian assistance within the United Nations system has this year been marked by a concerted effort on the part of the Secretary-General to reallocate responsibilities for humanitarian activities. In this context, we welcome the establishment of the new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the adoption by the General Assembly on 12 November of resolution 52/12, entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform". The operational activities that were formerly the responsibility of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, have been reallocated to other departments within the Secretariat and to operational agencies within the system.

The secondment of humanitarian personnel from other organizations in the United Nations system, as well as cooperation and coordination between the different agencies, will play a decisive role in achieving the aims of the Office. It is therefore essential to reinforce the role of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee under the chairmanship of the Emergency Relief Coordinator if consistency in policy both at Headquarters and on the ground is to be guaranteed. The viability — indeed, the success — of the new arrangements will depend upon the logical distribution of tasks, on a clear assumption of responsibility and, finally, on a division of labour between Geneva and New York that respects the particular qualities of each of those host cities.

The European Union believes that the principles set out in General Assembly resolution 46/182 will enable the new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator to take on the crucial tasks of coordinating relief efforts on the ground, organizing public relations activities to attract potential donors and liaising with the United Nations apparatus for maintaining peace. We welcome, in this context, the appointment of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello to the post of Emergency Relief Coordinator. The European Union will offer him its full support. It is our view that the basic services of the Emergency Relief Coordinator's Office should be financed from the United Nations regular budget.

In the effort to strengthen coordination, more attention should be paid to the role of implementing partners entrusted with carrying out many activities and to their relationship with the humanitarian agencies in order to enhance efficiency, accountability and monitoring of the results of humanitarian assistance. An analysis of this matter is contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit.

The European Union will follow with interest the establishment in the coming months of the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. We also attach particular importance to an appropriate follow-up to the reforms in humanitarian assistance in the light of the debate that will take place in the Economic and Social Council as provided for in the Council's resolution 1995/56.

One aspect of humanitarian assistance — the safety of humanitarian aid workers — is unfortunately, becoming a burning issue. The European Union will submit to the General Assembly a draft resolution on the safety of humanitarian workers that reflects our deep

concern at situations throughout the world where the safety of such workers is threatened.

The reasons for this state of affairs are many and complex. The general anarchy that reigns in many of today's crisis situations is certainly a factor. But of even greater concern is the evidence that aid workers are more and more being deliberately targeted. This highlights some of the realities now facing humanitarian aid projects. In the past, humanitarian principles and the impartiality of humanitarian action were respected by both sides in a conflict, but these no longer provide adequate guarantees for the security of humanitarian workers. Too often, it has become difficult, or even impossible for agencies and non-governmental humanitarian organizations to reach people affected by an armed conflict or the victims of other emergencies. We are all aware that it is civilian populations and refugees who suffer most in such situations.

Humanitarian assistance is directly affected by the political environment in which it is carried out. At the same time, humanitarian action can have a positive effect on such an environment. Apart from providing emergency relief in a humanitarian crisis, such action also helps reintegrate refugees and ex-combatants into civilian life, and this is often a crucial first step in stabilizing the situation and clearing the way for sustainable development in a country in crisis.

The question of access to people suffering hardships is of vital importance. The draft resolution thus appeals to Governments and parties involved in armed conflicts or other emergency situations to guarantee aid workers unrestricted access to the affected populations and to take all necessary steps to ensure that humanitarian activity can take place in an environment of safety. It also calls on States to hold to account anyone guilty of acts of violence towards aid workers. Finally, the draft resolution pays tribute to those who have given their lives while trying to help people in distress and salutes the courage of aid workers who continue to fulfil their mission, often in extremely dangerous circumstances.

In conclusion, the European Union remains acutely aware of the difficulties caused by natural disasters and complex emergencies, including the adverse impact that such crises can have on neighbouring States in the affected region. In this context, the European Union has offered substantial assistance to neighbouring countries in order to counteract the adverse economic impact of sanctions imposed against the former Yugoslavia. Although economic problems still remain in these countries, the European Union is pleased to note a marked improvement in the situation. The European Union remains, however, deeply concerned about serious humanitarian crises that persist in other regions. We shall, in the future, continue to help those countries as much as possible in their efforts to overcome their economic difficulties.

Mr. Konishi (Japan): Japan has long emphasized the importance of responding to humanitarian crises and disasters effectively and in a coordinated manner, and it has done so in a number of international forums. The issue of humanitarian assistance was discussed at the last substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, on the basis of the report of the Secretary-General. In this context, Japan appreciates the initiatives of the Secretary-General, endorsed on 12 November by the General Assembly, to further strengthen the United Nations capacity for launching coherent and coordinated humanitarian actions under the guiding principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to express its sincere gratitude to Mr. Yasushi Akashi, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and also Emergency Relief Coordinator at the same time, for fulfilling so ably the difficult mandate entrusted to him and with such limited resources. His achievements in the course of his long years of service at the United Nations deserve our great admiration and deep respect. I believe that his career should serve as a model for present and future United Nations staff members.

I would also like to express my congratulations to Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello on his appointment to the new post of Emergency Relief Coordinator and to wish him great success in his future work. Japan is ready to extend its full support to him in discharging his important responsibilities.

In carrying out his responsibilities, the new Emergency Relief Coordinator is expected to focus on three core functions, namely, policy development and coordination functions in support of the Secretary-General, advocacy of humanitarian issues with political organs and coordination of the humanitarian emergency response to crises. As Japan has long advocated that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs remain faithful to its function as a strategic centre for coordination and that it refrain from becoming involved in the operational field of humanitarian activities, it welcomes such an orientation, and is confident that, with its new and streamlined functions, the Office of the Emergency Relief

Coordinator, together with the strengthened Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), will contribute to an effective response to humanitarian crises. Furthermore, Japan hopes that the proposed steering committee of the IASC, which will consist of six members from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and a representative of non-governmental agencies, will contribute to increasing the speed of that response.

The new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator will commence operation at the beginning of next year, and it is important that it be structured and organized in such a manner as to ensure optimum implementation of the core functions. In this connection, my delegation wishes to make two comments.

First, Japan feels great concern over the fact that, according to the revised budget, the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator continues to depend largely on extrabudgetary personnel to carry out many of its functions, as did the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. However, inasmuch as the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator is a part of the United Nations Secretariat, further efforts should be made so that its core functions are financed through assessed contributions. To that end, the proportion of the staff funded by the regular budget should be gradually increased and dependence on extrabudgetary contributions reduced.

Secondly, I wish to refer to the Emergency Relief Coordinator's Offices in New York and in Geneva. The new Office will be relatively small in size and focused on its core activities. Considering the importance of a political interface with the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Japan supports the Secretary-General's plan with regard to the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator in New York. However, since the headquarters of major humanitarian organizations, which have direct links with field operations, are located in Geneva, Japan hopes that consideration will be given to the importance of the Office in Geneva when the new structure is finalized.

I would like to reiterate the need to address the issue of a smooth transition from emergency relief to rehabilitation and development. In this connection, the briefing given by Mr. Akashi in the Second Committee last Thursday on humanitarian crises and development was very informative and helpful. As he emphasized, planning for development should start at an early stage so that it will be sustainable, while humanitarian assistance agencies work at the same time to implement programmes that will help stimulate rehabilitation and development. To this end, a mechanism should be established for effecting close cooperation between humanitarian organizations and development agencies, so that the efforts of both may proceed in a coordinated and complementary manner.

Before concluding, I would like to touch upon one very important issue concerning humanitarian assistance. During the debate in the Third Committee earlier this month, serious concern was expressed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and many delegations over the attacks and threats that have been levelled at humanitarian personnel, including those from United Nations organizations. It is of the utmost importance that the international community act to protect humanitarian personnel, and Japan, on many occasions, has urged that this be done. Discussions earlier this year in the Security Council on the question of their safety, in which Japan was an active participant, produced two presidential statements: one on the security of United Nations operations, which was adopted on 12 March, and the other on protection for humanitarian assistance to refugees and others in conflict situations, which was adopted on 19 June. Japan is pleased to join the initiative of the European Union in calling for the international community to address the issue of the safety of humanitarian personnel. In this context, I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, which was adopted by the General Assembly on 9 December 1994 but, to our regret, has not yet come into force. Japan appeals to all countries that have not yet done so to become parties to this important agreement so that it will come into force without further delay. I hasten to add, however, that the adoption of a legal instrument in itself will not solve our problems. Japan continues to speak out on this issue and it will cooperate closely with all Member States in pursuing ways and means of improving the present situation.

Mr. Aass (Norway): Norway warmly welcomes the appointment of Sergio Vieira de Mello as Emergency Relief Coordinator, and we pledge our full support for him in his important new function.

At the same time we would like to express our appreciation for the work and dedication of Under-Secretary-General Yasushi Akashi in heading the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. Norway has strongly supported the Secretary-General's overall reform proposal and welcomes the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 52/12, on "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform", by consensus.

We look forward to the implementation of the Secretary-General's initiatives pertaining to the field of humanitarian advocacy and coordination. The reform proposals requiring intergovernmental decisions should be dealt with in the near future, including within the framework of the follow-up of the Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56.

Norway would like to highlight some elements in the humanitarian reform programme which we find to be of particular importance.

First, the authority of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, in his capacity as Humanitarian Coordinator, must be recognized and respected within the entire United Nations system. We are now entering the stage of system-wide implementation of agreed conclusions and recommendations.

Secondly, the Office of the Coordinator has been given a renewed opportunity to focus on its core mandate and functions. In this context, we welcome the decision to relieve the Office of all operational activities and allocate these to more appropriate parts of the system.

Thirdly, strong coordination between the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee is crucial. Consequently, the establishment of a joint secretariat is appropriate. Likewise, the secondment of staff to the Coordinator's Office from relevant parts of the United Nations system in order to ensure unified approaches to crisis management deserves our full support.

Fourthly, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs suffered from a chronic lack of sufficient funding. We strongly endorse the objective of including the activities of the Office of the Coordinator in the regular budget of the United Nations. Transitional voluntary funding must be the exception, not the rule.

A fifth point is that United Nations humanitarian activities are not sufficiently monitored and reviewed by Member States. We support the proposal to enhance the role of the Economic and Social Council in this respect and look forward to discussions about possible new monitoring mechanisms to be developed in a longer-term perspective.

The right to receive and to deliver humanitarian assistance is essential in international humanitarian law. This is the fundamental basis for discussions about the security of humanitarian personnel. We welcome and support the European Union initiative to focus on this particular problem under this agenda item. The international community should never accept that parties to a conflict interrupt humanitarian operations through criminal acts directed against humanitarian personnel. Joint efforts to eliminate such a flagrant violation of all humanitarian principles are urgently called for.

Mr. Yuan Shaofu (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): The Chinese delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for the series of reports that he submitted to this session of the General Assembly in connection with agenda item 20, entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance", and wishes to take this opportunity to state its views on some relevant aspects of this item.

The Chinese delegation has always shown great interest in emergency humanitarian relief activities, and attaches great importance to the role played by the United Nations in this field. On the basis of the progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 46/182 over the past six years and of an assessment of the activities of the United Nations in the humanitarian field, the Secretary-General, in his report on United Nations reform in document A/51/950, proposed certain actions and made some recommendations with regard to reform in the area of humanitarian affairs.

The Chinese delegation supports reform measures such as the establishment of an Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator to be headed by an Under-Secretary-General, as well as the strengthening of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the consolidated appeal process. The Chinese delegation believes that such reform will enable the United Nations system to further the implementation of General Assembly resolution 46/182, and to take concerted, expeditious and effective humanitarian action in response to natural disasters and emergencies, in accordance with the guiding principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, bringing into full

play the overall strengths of the United Nations in this field.

The Chinese delegation is of the view that the newly-established Emergency Relief Coordinator should focus more on three core functions — namely, policy formulation and coordination, the advocacy of humanitarian issues and the coordination of humanitarian emergency responses — in order to do a better job of implementing General Assembly resolution 46/182. Following the dissolution of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, its former responsibilities should be redistributed within the United Nations system in such a way as to ensure the continued provision of effective humanitarian assistance to disaster-stricken developing countries, to help them to carry out their post-disaster reconstruction and resume their economic development, and to enhance capacity-building in developing countries for disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness in a truly effective manner, so as to minimize the damages caused by various kinds of disasters.

Adequate resources are a prerequisite for providing humanitarian assistance to developing countries and assisting in their recovery and development. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 46/182, 68 United Nations inter-agency consolidated appeals have been made, resulting in a total of $10.4 billion to be used for assistance against various kinds of disasters. But this amount is far short of meeting the increasing needs of disaster-stricken countries for humanitarian assistance as a result of frequent natural and man-made disasters occurring all over the world. The Chinese delegation holds the view that development funds for disaster prevention and mitigation and for post-disaster reconstruction should not be provided from the limited development resources of other funds and programmes; instead, new sources of funding should be found in order to establish a special fund. Developed countries should make a commitment to contribute to such a fund, for without that the Secretary-General's reform would just be putting old wine in a new bottle, and the reform would lose its meaning.

Mr. Dimitrov (Bulgaria) (*interpretation from French*): On behalf of the delegation of Bulgaria, I would like to raise the question of economic assistance for countries affected by the Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

I take this opportunity to extend our thanks to the Secretary-General for the understanding he has shown and his energetic efforts he has made to find an adequate response to the serious problems that have accumulated over the past few years. The form and content of his report, contained in document A/52/535, allow us to structure our debates in a better way.

The question of the political consequences of the sanctions adopted by the Security Council is extremely important for Bulgaria, which has suffered great losses since the start of the commercial and economic embargo against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The following figures are indicative of the extent of the losses. Before the imposition of sanctions, 75 per cent of Bulgarian exports passed through the territory of our neighbour, which was also one of our main trading partners. For an economy such as Bulgaria's, 80 per cent of whose products are intended for foreign markets, such sanctions were extremely burdensome. We were practically cut off from the European markets, and a heavy blow was dealt to a number of industrial sectors traditionally linked to that region; as a result, the economic and financial situation of the country has been weakened. These negative effects were added to the difficulties already being encountered with the transition to a market economy. When the losses caused by observance of the sanctions against Iraq and Libya are added, the amount of direct and indirect losses is close to that of Bulgaria's external debt. Expert estimates based on a methodology proposed by the United Nations Development Programme mission place that amount at approximately $8 billion.

Unfortunately, even today, when the peace process has started and sanctions are being lifted, their effects are still felt on the socio-economic situation of Bulgaria and other affected countries.

In strictly observing the collective measures imposed by the United Nations, Bulgaria was counting on an equitable distribution of the economic burden within the international community. Bulgaria believes that the international community should demonstrate its political will and establish an effective mechanism for overcoming the losses endured by countries who have strictly complied with the United Nations resolutions.

Over the course of its last four sessions, the United Nations General Assembly has adopted resolutions on granting economic assistance to countries affected by the commercial and economic embargo against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Those resolutions, in Bulgaria's view, attest to the international community's understanding of the problems facing the countries so affected. Unfortunately, the effect of the implementation

of those resolutions is far from meeting our expectations and hopes of providing any adequate technological, financial and material assistance to compensate for the losses sustained. There have still been no positive changes with regard to the adoption of measures to create wider opportunities for participation in the post-conflict reconstruction and development of the former Yugoslavia.

I should like to take this opportunity to address international financial institutions, international organizations and Member countries and to appeal to them to take urgent and effective action. We count greatly on the assistance that can be provided by the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and intergovernmental and regional organizations. The radical changes that have taken place in Bulgaria since the accession to power of the new Government are a stable guarantee of the success of joint initiatives. Bulgaria has a satisfactory democratic framework and a national economic strategy that enable it to initiate and carry through substantial projects in such spheres as energy, transport, telecommunications and the environment, among others. Bulgarian businesses can play an active role in the humanitarian assistance organized by the United Nations for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly by furnishing supplies to the international peacekeeping forces.

The United Nations has a number of effective mechanisms that enable it to provide assistance and at the same time offer reliable instruments to respond to the needs that arise. International institutions can open special lines of credit for the implementation of approved projects, several of which concern all of Europe as well as the Middle East. Were they to grant trade preferences, the donor countries would encourage exports. They could also encourage their investors to a greater degree, since the changes brought about in Bulgarian legislation in this field open up new and positive prospects.

The implementation of the collective measures adopted by the United Nations must be based on the principle of equitable distribution of the onerous economic repercussions among all the member countries of the international community that have the necessary capacity. That is what is meant by collective responsibility for decisions taken.

Bulgaria hopes that a new and far more effective approach will be adopted vis-à-vis assistance to its economy to compensate it for the losses it has suffered. It is ready to participate constructively in the discussions under way on all aspects of the problem, with a view to finding the best solution.

Mr. Benítez Sáenz (Uruguay) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I have the honour to make this statement on agenda item 20 (e) on behalf of the countries members of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) — Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay — and the associated States of Bolivia and Chile.

We cannot remain aloof from an item as important as that of humanitarian assistance, and we stress the importance of considering this matter in the General Assembly.

Our countries are fully aware of the increased number of natural disasters that have befallen our planet, and our continent in particular. While mankind has not been able to stave off their inevitable outcome, it has taken the first major step in that direction by working collectively to cope with such situations.

The countries members of MERCOSUR believe that Argentina's proposal to establish a corps of "White Helmets" is an international initiative that could provide the Organization with a vital tool for dealing more effectively with humanitarian emergencies.

This is more than just another new body. It is an efficient and viable mechanism that will be available to the United Nations, with appropriate equipment and technically skilled and trained personnel, with the sole aim of providing immediate assistance in rehabilitation, reconstruction and development in critical emergency situations.

In the MERCOSUR context, the question of "White Helmets" was on the agenda of last year's summit meeting at Fortaleza. On that occasion our countries welcomed the initiative, and today we can say that such joint operations are being carried out in three of our countries and that they are being monitored by national institutions and our respective foreign ministries.

Since then, there have been three missions in the MERCOSUR region in Argentina, at Campo Gallo in Santiago del Estero Province, in Misiones Province and in the areas recently affected by the flooding of the Uruguay River as a result of the well-known El Niño phenomenon in Entre Ríos and Corrientes Provinces.

Missions have also been deployed in Alto Verá in Paraguay and in the Argentine-Brazilian border region around Bernardo de Irigoyen.

Uruguay is studying the possibility of joining the Alto Verá project and is at present selecting volunteers for the implementation of a drinking-water project in Haiti.

In 1997, in response to a request from the Bolivian Government, "White Helmets", together with the World Food Programme and the United Nations Development Programme, carried out a project for the control of Chagas' disease covering 5,000 households in the Department of Tarija.

Countries that suffer the effects of natural disasters will always require speedy and effective action that is apolitical, neutral and impartial and that can only be provided through humanitarian assistance.

As the delegation of Argentina noted in its introduction, we believe that the current reform process in the United Nations that the Secretary-General and his staff are so boldly carrying forward affords á unique opportunity to make in-depth changes in the Organization's humanitarian assistance.

In 1994, when the idea of creating a "White Helmets" corps was put forward, many of the countries that sponsored the initiative at that time sought to share ideas about seeking alternatives to strengthen the response capability and effectiveness of the United Nations in the humanitarian sphere.

The active involvement of more than 40 countries in support of the initiative is most relevant and deserves to be highlighted. This approach of involving States in support of international volunteer services, as proposed in the "White Helmets" initiative, will give new impetus to the participation of international civil society and strengthen and complement the current United Nations system of volunteers.

In addition, the teamwork concept makes the traditional approach to volunteerism more efficient in the conduct of missions, most of which are conducted in situations that pose extremely difficult problems of logistics and of communications with the rest of the world.

The institutional growth of the "White Helmets" initiative shows that it has been accepted conceptually by the international community and that it is now time for national focal points to begin to work more smoothly and rapidly. This is undoubtedly the starting point for strengthening the capacity of the international community to respond to humanitarian emergencies through the coordination of the United Nations.

Before concluding, I would like, on behalf of the entire group, to state our satisfaction at knowing that we have this new humanitarian tool that will enable us in the very near future to provide assistance to victims of natural disasters in our own MERCOSUR countries, as well as in other regions that so require.

We hope that this joint initiative will be seen as a means of making full use of the capacity our countries hold in reserve to provide greater support to the United Nations in its emergency and rehabilitation activities.

Mr. Hynes (Canada) (*interpretation from French*): Last July Canada warmly welcomed the measures proposed by the Secretary-General to strengthen the United Nations humanitarian system. These reforms seek to better focus the capacities of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and his new Office on the three core functions established by the General Assembly six years ago.

We also welcome the appointment of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello to the post of Coordinator. For Canada, the reforms he is to implement must amount to more than a mere reshuffling of previous arrangements. In its recommendations on a wide range of issues the working group of the Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs has established an excellent basis on which to approach this challenge. With his vast experience in the humanitarian and peacekeeping fields, Mr. De Mello should be able to provide the needed leadership.

(spoke in English)

In Canada's view, an important key to the success of the humanitarian reform process will be the establishment of clearer lines of authority and of accountability among those involved in emergency-response decision-making.

The humanitarian agencies, as the ultimate delivery mechanisms for emergency relief, must clearly be engaged in the decision-making process, and thus committed to its results. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has a crucial role to play in this regard. To ensure that it will be effective and action-

oriented, Canada believes that the IASC should be kept to a manageable size.

But the essential purpose of the United Nations humanitarian machinery is not to secure broad bureaucratic consensus at any cost. It is, rather, to bring timely and effective relief to victims in times of crisis and conflict. We therefore urge the Emergency Relief Coordinator and all IASC members to agree quickly on the basic criteria for future coordination arrangements. And when it comes to addressing specific emergencies, we will look to all agencies to be flexible and to cooperate fully in responding to requirements identified by the Emergency Relief Coordinator. And, ultimately, when quick consensus cannot be reached on key issues concerning the allocation or the sharing of responsibilities, the Coordinator must have the authority to decide or, where appropriate, to recommend to the Secretary-General clear courses of action.

An important related question is the role of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and its relationship with the IASC and its proposed steering committee. Canada encourages the Secretary-General and the Coordinator to give urgent attention to clarifying the terms of reference for each of these mechanisms and to ensuring their complementarity.

We also hope the Security Council will continue to show a strong interest in humanitarian matters. The Council's March meeting with several non-governmental humanitarian organizations and its May 1997 debate on protection for humanitarian assistance in conflict situations provide valuable precedents on which to build. As stated by the Secretary-General in his report on the work of the Organization, such initiatives hold promise for the development of an integrated approach to conflict resolution, an approach in which the political, military, humanitarian, development and human rights dimensions would be addressed in a mutually reinforcing fashion.

Concerning resources for humanitarian coordination, the new biennium budget proposals being discussed in the Fifth Committee project a continued heavy reliance by the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator on extrabudgetary financing. Resources for actual humanitarian assistance efforts will inevitably continue to be derived primarily from voluntary contributions. But it does not follow that the basic bureaucratic infrastructure contained in the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator should be dependent on, or preoccupied with, a constant search for funds merely to ensure its continued existence and operation. It is therefore our hope that one day we will have an Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator securely and predictably funded in its entirety from the United Nations regular budget.

Allow me to say a few words on one area of activity being divested from the direct responsibility of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. I want to express Canada's profound appreciation for the leadership role the United Nations Secretariat has played since 1988 in setting up programmes for humanitarian demining in many of the countries most affected by the scourge of anti-personnel mines. We hope that in the process of being transferred to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Mine Clearance and Policy Unit will sustain and, indeed, increase its effectiveness. We trust that the Department will give the humanitarian-demining programme the priority attention it warrants, and we hope the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs will continue to contribute to the United Nations leadership in this area.

Finally, it is for Canada, as it is for others who have spoken before us, a matter of grave concern that humanitarian personnel are increasingly being required to perform their duties in environments where they are subject to threats and often deadly force. We urge the new Emergency Relief Coordinator to give this issue serious attention, and we encourage all humanitarian actors to work, in cooperation with the United Nations Security Coordinator, in drawing up recommendations on measures to improve the security of humanitarian personnel.

To conclude, I want to reiterate Canada's appreciation for the humanitarian reform measures introduced by the Secretary-General. The United Nations humanitarian-assistance system plays a crucial, high-profile role in meeting the demands placed on the Organization today. Getting this aspect of reform right will clearly be an important key to ensuring that the entire United Nations reform effort succeeds — and that it is seen by the world to succeed. In their efforts to make this happen, the Secretary-General and the new Emergency Relief Coordinator will have Canada's unqualified support.

Mrs. Mendoza Bilbao (Bolivia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): My delegation fully endorses the statement made on the item under consideration by the Ambassador of Uruguay on behalf of the States members and associates of the Southern Cone Common Market.

The work of the United Nations, in coordination with the various agencies of the system, as well as with international and non-governmental organizations, has been and continues to be commendable in providing humanitarian and disaster relief assistance. The efforts made and the results achieved have been considerable, but they remain far below the desirable levels of providing victims not only with the assistance required at any given time, but also with rehabilitation and full incorporation into the active life of a society. Aware of the link between humanitarian assistance, poverty and development, all those involved in the international community must commit themselves directly to this mission.

We therefore believe that the "White Helmets" Volunteers initiative opens an innovative route to providing effective, efficient and economical humanitarian assistance. It is important to stress the capacity of this mechanism to respond promptly and in a coordinated fashion to natural disaster and emergency situations, while remaining apolitical, neutral and impartial in its humanitarian work. It also calls for a minimum of fixed costs, using existing organizations and the assistance capabilities of participating countries, which provide volunteers and funds for humanitarian activities for emergencies the world over.

Despite its newness, the "White Helmets" initiative has contributed significantly to simple emergency assistance, rehabilitation within the existing programmes of various United Nations agencies and the generation of additional United Nations projects. It has a become a genuine support mechanism for international assistance and mobilization throughout the world.

Bolivia has, from the outset, supported this far-sighted idea of Argentina's. In 1993 and 1994, it carried out an experimental programme at the Bolivian-Argentine border, on the basis of which it decided fully to endorse the "White Helmets" initiative, encouraging concrete activities and allocating special funds to that end. In this context, in 1995, Bolivia established by supreme decree the National Commission for the "White Helmets" Movement, jointly under the Ministry for Sustainable Development and Planning and the Ministry for Health and Social Welfare.

In November 1996, during the official visit to Bolivia of the President of the Argentine Republic, a constitutional agreement was signed, creating the Binational "White Helmets" Commission. This established provisions for both States to observe General Assembly resolution 49/139 B and committed the respective National "White Helmets" Commissions to combat poverty and hunger and to resolve problems of basic sanitation and education. The Binational Commission seeks to provide human-resource training to that end and may call on the help of experts in specific areas.

My delegation wishes once again to reiterate its firm support for the work of the "White Helmets" and appeals to the international community to give extensive support to this mechanism by providing qualified human resources and financial resources to the Special Voluntary Fund of the United Nations Volunteers.

The delegation of Bolivia, committed to the goals of the "White Helmets" Volunteers in activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development, is a sponsor of the draft resolution submitted under this item.

Mr. Guarini (United States of America): The United States Government would like to reiterate its support for the establishment of the new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. We are pleased that the Secretary-General has moved quickly to name the new Coordinator and that he has selected a person with so much experience in working on and managing multi-agency response to humanitarian crises. My Government looks forward to working closely with Mr. Vieira de Mello. We will be interested to see how Governments can be effectively involved in the policy and decision-making process.

I would like to take this opportunity to urge all agencies to work together with the new Emergency Relief Coordinator. In order for the new office to fulfil its role, it is important that agencies second highly-qualified people from their staff for the senior-management team of the Coordinator's Office.

The United States is the largest government contributor to the voluntarily funded programmes of the United Nations. This increases the value we place on these measures for a more effective, efficient and streamlined humanitarian response to complex emergencies.

We welcome the efforts that organizations are making to systematize their relations with other organizations through memorandums of understanding. These are critical steps towards enhanced coordination and cooperation. In addition to coordination among United Nations agencies, we urge more reaching out to

other partners, non-governmental organizations and other international organizations that have a wealth of experience and input to bring to the table.

The coordination of relief and development assistance is on everyone's lips. The word "continuum" is frequently used. My Government believes that, in order to achieve the continuum, coordination should begin early in a crisis, not at the end. A strategic plan and time-frame involving all the agencies which will play a role in a humanitarian situation and its aftermath should be put into place as soon as possible. The catalyst behind this, we believe, should be the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Turning to the specific sub-items, we commend the Government of Argentina for the initiative it has taken in devising and promoting the concept of "White Helmets". My Government is pleased to be able to support "White Helmets" in the field and in the General Assembly.

Let me now say a few words about Chernobyl. The United States recognizes the ongoing effort within the United Nations to address the grave consequences to public health of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. The hardships encountered by the many victims of Chernobyl in Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and elsewhere are of global concern, so it is fitting that the nations of the global community should gather here today in recognition of their continuing plight.

As chair of the G-7 this year, the United States has been involved in an important effort under the G-7/Ukraine Memorandum of Understanding on closing Chernobyl by the year 2000. As part of our support to Ukraine under this Memorandum, the G-7 has commenced an international initiative to stabilize the deteriorating sarcophagus over the destroyed Chernobyl reactor, which has begun to release radiation into the environment. It is time to begin to help Ukraine develop a longer-term solution to this complex and dangerous problem, and at the same time to help the region — and the world, in fact — to find firm and environmentally-sound answers to the lingering question of Chernobyl. It was for these reasons that the G-7 and Ukraine convened the Chernobyl Sarcophagus Pledging Conference — in which many Governments represented here participated — here in New York on 20 November. I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the G-7, to thank all who participated in that Conference, and in particular those who pledged in support of this effort.

The draft resolution before us today is a reaffirmation of our commitment not to forget the victims of Chernobyl. We must indeed continue to work together, as members of the world community who share the global commons, to address the tragic Chernobyl experience and legacy.

Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The delegation of Lebanon would first like to express its appreciation for the important report submitted to us by the Secretary-General on assistance for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon.

(*spoke in English*)

I would like to point out that I am referring to document E/1997/96, which was also supposed to be issued as a General Assembly document. I thank the Secretariat, which has promised to make the document available before the impending adoption of the draft resolution on this agenda item.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

This report highlights the developments in the process of reconstruction and development of the country during the course of the past year and up until the few weeks which preceded the convening of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in June and July 1997. It also points out the strenuous efforts made by the Lebanese Government in cooperation with international organization donors and the status of the implementation of operational programmes included in the general strategic plan laid down by the Government, under the title of "the plan for the year 2000" which covers the years 1997 through 2002.

It is clear that despite its importance and comprehensive nature the report only sketches a general picture of the trends of the implementation policy of the subjects within the framework of the general strategy on reconstruction and development, along with significant observations thereon. It is not possible to gauge in such a succinct report the development that has taken place or to understand the complexities, difficulties and challenges accompanying the implementation measures. This report must therefore be read with the understanding that it complements numerous other reports drafted by donor organizations in Lebanon, such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and others, as they dealt with the detailed aspects of the programme components, thereby helping establish a link between strategic topics and the programme components, as stressed in paragraph 21 of the report of the Secretary-General.

In the past few months, Lebanon has received a great number of leading international donor institutions and State officials, including the President of the World Bank, the President of the International Institution of Investments and Guarantees and the Executive Director of UNICEF, among others. Likewise, Lebanese officials paid many visits to other capitals to help enhance international interest, in the process of consolidating civil peace and strengthening reconstruction and development in the country. This active diplomatic movement reflects increasing interest in Lebanon's pioneering and unique experience as a post-conflict peace-building country. Moreover, international interest increasingly emerges through the attention given to it by global mass media, which has expressed admiration for the rise of the phoenix from ashes.

However, we believe that this report has not sufficiently underscored the new philosophy proposed by the Secretary-General and the Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs with regard to the unique nature of the special transitional period experienced by the States which build peace after conflict. In his annual report on the work of the Organization (A/52/1), the Secretary-General considered that post-conflict situations have special requirements and that successful recovery from disturbances caused by conflicts is assisted by facing up quickly to general development challenges, and the provision of appropriate legal frameworks, stable social and political environments and economic opportunities.

Furthermore, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Akashi, recently stressed in his statement before the Second Committee of the General Assembly the need for conflict-solution strategies with a view to coordinating political, humanitarian and development responses on the basis of clear-cut and well-defined principles that ensure a positive link between relief and development. This philosophy lies at the basis of the work of the "White Helmets", as is made clear in the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/586.

It would have been possible to view the Lebanese experience as an example of this philosophy, along with requisite encouraging, or even preferential, measures to foster the efforts made and to bring about their success. We should take into consideration that these encouraging measures respond to the principle adopted by donor organizations in preparing their country-development sessions regarding recipient States, with a view to extending additional incentives by increasing the assistance allocated to these States which succeed in implementing their development programmes.

The experience of reconstruction and development in Lebanon underscores the effective impact of international and regional cooperation. It highlights the dynamics of the market system and the effective coordination among basic economic actors in the framework of the system, with the State as the guiding and organizing power, the private sector as the prime catalyst of the capital market and the civil sector as the receiving body which is passively or positively influenced by the programmes.

The success accomplished by the collective national will of the Lebanese people to perpetuate civil peace in their homeland and to reconstruct and develop it has sometimes led us to forget that we rose from the rubble and cast off the negative consequences of a war that lasted for 17 years and destroyed large portions of our cities and villages. We are dealing with the activities of reconstruction as if they were development activities taking place in a country that had enjoyed peace for decades.

This is a good indicator of the positive evolution of reconstruction and development in Lebanon, yet it poses additional challenges that augment the complexities of the exceptional circumstances which Lebanon is now experiencing. We say this because, like the other Member States of the United Nations, Lebanon is called upon to implement whatever was agreed in the various international conferences held in the past seven years under the aegis of the United Nations. This has taken place at a time when international development assistance has dwindled, economic globalization has increased, and the international political and economic rules that affect the trends in national economic activities and their ability to face marginalization and integration into the new world economic order have become intertwined.

The Government's basic concerns remains centred on building the infrastructure which is necessary to activate the economic movement in the country. However, these concerns bifurcate to include all sectors, particularly the repatriation of evacuees, grappling with environmental pollution, reforming the administration, the development of outlying areas, and increasing social and health care and educational programmes. This situation, which combines rehabilitation and reconstruction activities with the need to establish sustainable development in conformity with the outcomes of the

United Nations conferences, necessitates the provision of special economic assistance by the international community. We call upon the international community to provide that assistance.

We have striven to have the national-development session conform with development sessions of various United Nations operational activities, with a view to establishing a link between common themes and programme components within the framework of the public strategy prepared by the Government for reconstruction and development. This is why we have cooperated with a number of main international partners, particularly the World Bank. The Lebanese Government has repeatedly stated its commitment to cooperation and coordination with the representatives of donor States, institutions and the civil and private sectors in the drawing up of operational programmes within the framework of the general strategy and monitoring its implementation and assessing its results. This has been emphasized and commended in all of the periodic reports issued by the relevant international institutions, including the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

One example of this cooperation is the reformulation of the national reports submitted by Lebanon to the various international conferences held under the auspices of the United Nations during this decade. Of course, we face numerous problems and shortcomings affecting the implementation of reconstruction and development programmes. We do not hide this fact. It is conceivable that one of the positive features that helps us bolster these programmes is transparency which governs the economic activities of the country. This feature is one of the components of our democratic system. Thus there is an open discussion, including the mass media, of these problems and how to tackle them. Such discussion enables all sectors of the Lebanese population to express their views and thus enriches the process of finding solutions and implementing them.

We have taken note of the important observations contained in the report of the Secretary-General, particularly those relating to the need to expedite the performance of administrative and legislative bodies to absorb available international resources and to increase human resources which are qualified to respond to the implementation requirements of envisaged programmes.

Yet, one of the basic obstacles to the reconstruction and development process is the stagnation in the peace process in the region. This is due to Israel's intransigent policy, its refusal to implement Security Council resolution 425 (1978), its continued occupation of parts of the Lebanese territories, and its carrying out of near-daily in-depth raids in Lebanese territories. This is in addition to repeated threats voiced by Israeli officials, including the bombardment of infrastructures such as electricity-generating power plants and water-storage facilities, as Israel did in the course of its aggression against Lebanon in April 1996.

We wish to express our gratitude to all donors and to our partners in the process of reconstruction and development, particularly those who participated in the "Friends of Lebanon" Conference, held in Washington on 16 December 1996. By the same token, we hope that international support will continue and be enhanced in order to assist our country to realize its comprehensive programme of reconstruction and development.

Mr. Gorelik (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): Russia attaches great importance to strengthening the United Nations system's capacity to tackle humanitarian crises and other emergencies. For a number of reasons, we were not able to discuss the entire range of problems relating to this coordinating role of the United Nations at last summer's session of the Economic and Social Council, but we hope that this issue will not be put on a back burner and that it will receive thorough consideration during the humanitarian segment of the upcoming substantive session of the Council next year. This should allow us to adopt substantive recommendations aimed at streamlining and strengthening cooperation among all humanitarian partners.

Our delegation attaches great importance to the debate on the July reform package proposed by the Secretary-General, including his proposal to transform the Department of Humanitarian Affairs into the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. We welcome the appointment of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello to the post of Emergency Relief Coordinator and hope he will participate actively in the efforts to solve the complex problems relating to humanitarian operations, preparedness and early warning for emerging humanitarian crises. We expect the Coordinator to focus on the priority areas of the Office's activities — policy issues, coordination and advocacy of humanitarian principles — and also on promoting interaction with the Security Council, including the humanitarian aspects of sanctions. We hope that the New York and Geneva branches of the Office will work closely together in a productive collaboration with humanitarian agencies and

all other parties involved in the efforts to deal with emergencies.

Russia takes this opportunity to express its appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Yasushi Akashi, who is retiring now. He made an extraordinary contribution to United Nations efforts in the area of humanitarian response, and we wish him every success in his future endeavours.

I should like now to turn to post-Chernobyl activities. First of all, I would highlight the importance of last May's United Nations inter-agency mission, in which representatives of donor countries and other organizations assessed the needs of the States affected. We also welcome the international seminar on the theme, "Chernobyl and beyond: humanitarian assistance to victims of technological disasters", which was organized last May by Russia with the assistance of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. We attach great importance to these events, which were part of the effort to take practical measures to help the victims. The proposals put forward at those meetings by international experts were in line with the special programme on protecting the people affected up to the year 2000, which was adopted by the Government of the Russian Federation last August.

Russia is grateful to the United Nations for the work of the inter-agency programme of international assistance to Chernobyl-affected areas, and it expects that projects under this programme will become part of the work of the special Coordinator on Chernobyl, who will focus on mobilizing the support of the world community. In this connection, we trust that the special meeting on Chernobyl, to be held here tomorrow, 25 November, will have fruitful results. We urge Member States to participate actively in this meeting.

We are also counting on the support of Member States for the consensus adoption of a draft resolution on the strengthening of international cooperation to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. The draft is sponsored by the three countries affected: Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

We would like to turn now to the humanitarian situation in Tajikistan. Resolution 51/30 J resulted in concrete efforts to mitigate the humanitarian crisis in this neighbouring and friendly country. We welcome also the current donors' conference in Vienna, and we expect it to make an important contribution to dealing with that emergency. Russia is actively involved in the peace settlement and the restoration of normalcy as well as in assisting the affected population. The report of the Secretary-General confirms the urgency of the humanitarian situation, particularly for the most vulnerable groups. It is important that humanitarian agencies continue their work in Tajikistan in 1998.

We are following with great sympathy and genuine interest the recent work on the "White Helmets" initiative. Some achievements have been made, but the initiative, we feel, should be given additional impetus in advancing towards one of its principal original goals: to develop a network of volunteer teams that would respond rapidly to emergency situations. Here we need to utilize not only the capacity of United Nations volunteers but also of that of humanitarian agencies and national rescue teams.

Turning to yet another problem area, we also are concerned about growing threats to and attacks on humanitarian personnel. We believe it important and relevant to address this problem in a General Assembly resolution. All parties involved in conflicts should adhere to the principles governing humanitarian assistance and respect international humanitarian law. Of course, this is more easily said than done, but every effort should be made to protect humanitarian personnel. The Security Council issued a timely reminder of that imperative in its statement of 19 June 1997.

Because there are such a regrettable number of conflict situations, it is important to continue to focus our attention on the continuing crises in the Great Lakes region, in the Horn of Africa, in Angola, and in Africa as a whole. In all these cases, we must take into account not only the symptoms but the causes of the disease: underdevelopment, the struggle for resources and ethnic tensions. These root causes, I would point out, are applicable to all "hot spots".

Mr. Tesfaye (Ethiopia): The agenda item on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance to individual countries in various regions, is of considerable interest to my delegation. Many parts of the world have continued to be afflicted by natural and man-made disasters and emergencies. This combination of man-made and natural disasters has created an enormous demand for United Nations involvement and assistance.

Special programmes of assistance to distressed countries and emergency humanitarian assistance are, indeed, today's greatest challenges to the United Nations and to the international community as a whole. In Ethiopia, as we grapple with the many manifestations of socio-economic underdevelopment, we continue to encounter a multitude of impediments as a result of our limited capacity to cope with very grave adverse exogenous factors.

Notwithstanding the important achievements in our efforts to attain food self-sufficiency over the past several years, the effects of the recent global climatic change known as El Niño have posed a serious challenge. This climatic change is currently affecting the countries of our subregion, resulting in an immense human toll and material destruction, as witnessed in Somalia, where more than 2,000 people have already died and where many more are exposed to an extremely dangerous situation. In Ethiopia as well, the situation has become alarming with the continued unseasonable rainfall, which has led to the destruction of crops in certain parts of the country, thus causing a chronic food shortage. As a result of this, the Ethiopian Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission has appealed to the international community to provide 154,107 metric tons of emergency food assistance for distribution among the affected population. In this connection, my delegation would like to call upon the international community, and in particular the United Nations system, to mobilize support and assistance.

The question of refugees and displaced persons presents yet another humanitarian challenge which needs a more vigorous approach and response. Despite our economic difficulties, Ethiopia continues to host a large number of refugees and to rehabilitate thousands of returnees and displaced persons. The hosting of large numbers of refugees has meant increased exploitation of already scarce resources, and has also had a bearing on the environment as a source of energy, shelter and food. In the light of this, it is our view that the scope of humanitarian assistance should be widened to address such problems encountered by host countries.

It is true that all those problems and others are shared by many developing countries, especially those in Africa. Therefore, while we appreciate all the bilateral and multilateral assistance being extended to us in the many areas of economic and emergency activities, we continue to emphasize the need for greater coordination and integration of the humanitarian response with reconstruction and long-term development to complement our national efforts.

Emergency assistance should not be viewed as a form of support designed to last forever. Economic assistance permitting greater economic advances by creating development-friendly framework conditions and an opportunity for attaining self-sufficiency is of paramount importance. Furthermore, the United Nations agencies dealing with emergencies and development cooperation should be streamlined to ensure efficiency and to use the dwindling resources at their disposal in a more cost-effective manner, focusing on programme activities. In this context, my delegation welcomes the Secretary-General's measures and proposals aimed at reforming the humanitarian activities of the United Nations.

My delegation believes that in undertaking emergency humanitarian activities the inputs of affected countries or regions are pertinent. These activities should in particular make greater use of local know-how in the planning and implementation of programmes and projects. Giving recipient Governments project responsibility and involving local experts would lead to more efficiency, cost-effectiveness and sustainability.

The need for greater commitment to financing multilateral cooperation in emergency humanitarian assistance and to contributing to development is crucial, as inadequate funding renders the successful implementation of projects difficult.

My delegation would like to see the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) strengthen its function as the primary mechanism for interagency coordination under the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator. The IASC should also look into so-called homeless issues such as the question of treatment of internally displaced persons and the problem of the continuum from emergency relief to rehabilitation. Especially on the problem of the continuum from emergency relief to rehabilitation and reconstruction, the United Nations system should plan a comprehensive policy and strategy for the post-emergency period in a given situation, so that the momentum for multilateral cooperation to cope with emergency situations may be sustained and developed through the stage of rehabilitation and reconstruction.

With regard to the development of an emergency information and early-warning system, as stressed in General Assembly resolutions 46/182 and 48/57, Ethiopia takes note of the efforts made so far by various agencies in this field and earnestly hopes that the mechanisms put

in place will be further developed so that an improved level of coordination may be achieved.

My delegation believes that policies and strategies related to disasters, whether in terms of emergency response or of preventive measures, need to include a vulnerability analysis of the effects of the environment, the human element and the ecology. The need for vulnerability assessments has become all the more important since such assessments lead to a better understanding of vulnerability to disasters, which in turn helps decision-makers to take appropriate measures to mitigate and overcome them. Furthermore, such assessments, in addition to helping in the planning of appropriate programmes to reduce vulnerability, also provide information which makes it easier to target beneficiaries, to prepare relief plans and to put in place the right preparedness modalities in such a way that they enhance development efforts. But this alone will not yield all the capacities required to tackle the root causes of vulnerability unless it is augmented by the financial, material and technical assistance of our development partners.

In concluding, I wish to emphasize the importance of the work that the United Nations is undertaking to help people in desperate need of the support and assistance of the international community. Behind the statistics of missions conducted, dollars contributed and tons of supplies delivered by the international community, there is the human reality of lives saved, children fed and hopes reborn. Therefore, the important humanitarian mission of this world body, the United Nations, deserves the full support of the international community.

Mr. Mirza (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The delegation of the United Arab Emirates sincerely thanks the Secretary-General for his notes and comprehensive reports on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance. These describe the various humanitarian activities carried out by the United Nations to meet the increasing demand for humanitarian assistance in various parts of the world. We are grateful too for the leading role played by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in this area.

The United Arab Emirates agrees with other speakers about the destructive effects of natural disasters and other emergencies, particularly those that cause great loss of human life, property and State infrastructure, and that have far reaching effects on the social and economic development plans of developing countries, in particular the least-developed countries. Despite United Nations efforts to contain the negative humanitarian effects resulting from several of these disasters, humanitarian needs have not been met to the requisite degree on a wider scale. This is due to the exacerbation of existing crises on the one hand, and the apparent lack of resources on the other hand. This situation required an increase in humanitarian assistance and activation of the relevant United Nations machinery, in particular the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Central Emergency Revolving Fund.

Furthermore, the need calls for strengthening coordination between the aforementioned and other regional and international development programmes, and first and foremost the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in order to mobilize economic resources and their generous influx of contributions required for a speedy response to the needs of affected and vulnerable peoples.

The United Arab Emirates is among the leading countries that have worked in earnest, acting upon the instruction of His Excellency Sheikh Zayed ibn Sultan Al-Nuhayyan. It has paid special attention to external humanitarian assistance issues and has provided unparalleled assistance to many developing countries, particularly those which have suffered natural disasters and civil and regional wars.

In confirmation of our commitment to a humanitarian approach based on our authentic Arab customs, civilizational values and the noble precepts of Islamic Shari'a, we have established the Abu Dhabi Development Fund as one of the main channels for providing developing countries with assistance and concessional loans in order to help them in the implementation of their various projects in the fields of education, health, agriculture and other humanitarian services. We have also participated in other funds and financial establishments dealing with development, especially those in developing countries and in the least developed countries. This is not to mention bolstering the role of institutions and charitable organizations, notably the Zayed charitable organization and the Red Crescent, as well as other organizations, aimed at helping them achieve their humanitarian objectives for the purpose of mobilizing local efforts in the public and private sectors, and meeting appeals to meet human needs and emergency demands in parts of the world that have been affected or are impoverished.

Throughout the past few years, successive world events have indicated that disasters — caused by people resorting to armed force in their ethnic, civil, ideological or border wars — have been increasing in a manner unprecedented in modern history. Such crises have been reflected in the exacerbation of many dangerous humanitarian problems, such as displacement, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, ecological deterioration, exposure to chronic diseases and permanent physical deformation of individuals. Therefore, my Delegation, which expresses its concern over the continuation of such issues, supports peaceful, just, permanent and comprehensive solutions to these conflicts on the basis of international legitimacy and the rules of international law. We also support other efforts to establish early warning mechanisms and effective data bases that can contribute to maximizing the capacities for disaster management and a speedy international response to the requirements of sudden emergencies and to the implementation of development projects and reconstruction in affected countries.

The reports on the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories indicate a regression in the economy of the Palestinian people compared with its level before the start of the peace process. This is the inevitable result of the collective economic punishment, and the policy of blockade and starvation pursued by the Israeli Government vis-à-vis the Palestinian people. It is also the result of the stringent restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities and its armed forces, which are equipped with weapons which are most dangerous to humanity, in order to limit the movement of the Palestinian people's sons and goods to and from the cities of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and their suburbs. This is not to mention other unjust practices aimed at preventing or delaying receipt by the Palestinian Authority of international support funds. Such practices have delayed the completion of projects to construct industrial complexes and the opening of the Gaza port and airport. Moreover, the implementation of programmes of international humanitarian agencies concerned with the provision of assistance has been obstructed.

This has precipitated the spread of disease and poverty in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories. It has led to a decrease in production in the Palestinian Authority's areas of more than 60 per cent and to at least a 65 per cent increase in unemployment. This is considered a flagrant and clear violation not only of the peace agreements but also of all relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and of all international humanitarian pacts and norms.

The United Arab Emirates pins great hopes on international development assistance in support of plans for the establishment of national Palestinian institutions and for developing the local technical capacities of the Palestinian people in order to enable it to implement its economic and social development plans with a view to its proper integration into international trade. We reaffirm the importance of bringing international pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to force it immediately to stop its dangerous policies that violate the basic human rights of the Palestinian people. We urge the international community, particularly the donor countries, to meet their obligations in a manner that will help to achieve a better life for the Palestinian people.

Mr. Sharma (India): We thank the Secretary-General for the reports which are under discussion today. They are exhaustive and comprehensive in nature and respond to the importance that the international community attaches to the crucial issue of humanitarian assistance. India also accords the highest importance to the provision of humanitarian assistance to those in need, while respecting fully the guiding principles for such assistance that have been so clearly outlined in section I of the annex to resolution 46/182. These principles are valid and time-tested, and their continued application would contribute towards success in relieving pain and suffering.

We have noted that the Secretary-General has preferred to present a more comprehensive report on the follow-up to resolution 46/182 at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, keeping in view several actions and recommendations that have been proposed, and are being considered by us, for reform of the humanitarian sector of the United Nations. While we await the report of the Secretary-General with great interest, it is essential that the reform process does not lead to a reinterpretation of the guiding principles of humanitarian assistance. These are notably humanity, neutrality and impartiality; full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States; primary importance of the consent of the affected countries and their appeal; and, finally, the primacy of the role of the affected State in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory. My delegation would support all humanitarian activities under the United Nations aegis within these specified parameters.

We would also like to stress that the gravity of humanitarian emergencies should not blur the distinctions

between the various United Nations agencies or override the requirements, desires or wishes of sovereign Governments. Clear distinctions need to be made in defining the relationship between functions and imperatives of peacekeeping and peacemaking, and the principles of humanitarian access. The distinction is a fine one, but nevertheless a relevant, crucial and valid one. It was stressed at the last Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Countries in New Delhi in April 1997.

Mr. Enkhsaikhan (Mongolia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We are therefore concerned about the statements that have been made in some of the reports of the Secretary-General, notably document A/52/586, that activities undertaken in response to humanitarian emergencies have extended to areas like conflict prevention and resolution. It has also been indicated that there is a need to explore further the potential contribution of some humanitarian actors in preventive action, particularly in the humanitarian and development fields. Such concepts, which are yet to receive intergovernmental mandates, may further complicate and detract from the task of providing humanitarian assistance to victims of natural disasters and other emergencies.

In the context of international development cooperation, my delegation would caution against detailed and comprehensive reports becoming a mechanism for seeming acceptance of ideas that are still evolving in other forums. I refer specifically to document A/52/532, which in paragraph 43 refers to the inability of the United Nations system in Somalia to avail itself of established institutional mechanisms, such as preparation of a country strategy note. My delegation would like to stress that a country strategy note is, and remains, a voluntary initiative, in the context of the United Nations Development Programme, and is not an essential institutional mechanism.

I would now like to refer briefly to the agenda item on assistance to the Palestinian people. We have noted the efforts of the Special Coordinator, focused on coordination of donor-funded projects, provision of budgetary support to the Palestinian National Authority and strengthening of institution-building programmes. India, despite constraints, has been contributing to the process of assistance to the Palestinian people through scholarships and cultural exchange programmes. More than 50 specialized training slots were offered during the period April 1996 to March 1997, at an estimated cost of 5.5 million rupees. India also pledged $1 million at the Washington donor's Conference in October 1995 and a further $1 million at the subsequent pledging conference in Paris in January 1996. These pledges are being utilized both for provision of goods and for undertaking projects in the Palestinian National Authority territory. India has also offered to set up a common facility centre for imparting training in vocational activities such as software development, computer programming and computerized numerically controlled (CNC) machines.

My delegation has noted, with concern, that while the needs for humanitarian assistance have increased, the response of the donors has not been proportionate or adequate. To cite but one example, we are concerned that for Angola, as against the requirement of $228.48 million for the period January to December 1997, an amount of only $61.89 million, or 28.7 per cent, had been pledged or received in contributions by the end of September 1997. There is a need to ensure provision of adequate financial resources for the implementation of activities related to humanitarian assistance, while at the same time ensuring that such resources are additional to, and not diverted from the already scarce resources for development.

My delegation commends the continued efforts of the United Nations system, despite this uncertain resource position, to bring relief and assistance to those in need in several parts of the world. Its actions have served to underline the predominant and central role of the United Nations in the coordination of humanitarian assistance. We are convinced that the reforms of the United Nations in the humanitarian sector will further enhance its ability to respond to the emerging needs.

Before I conclude, I wish to convey my delegation's deep appreciation and admiration for the dedication and commitment with which many relief and assistance organizations and personnel, United Nations and non-United Nations, are functioning, under the most difficult and trying conditions, in bringing succour to those in need. They often work under daily threats to their own personal safety and security and deserve our unstinted praise.

Mr. Kenik (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Belarus, I should like to congratulate Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko on his presidency of this prestigious international forum. As in the past, we have gathered here to discuss further options and measures to provide assistance to the victims of the most devastating technological disaster in the

history of humankind. The consistent position of the United Nations with regard to the problem of Chernobyl shows once again that kindness and compassion remain the paramount values of the human race, forging and strengthening mutual understanding and friendship between peoples.

The widely attended international scientific conferences held in 1995 and 1996 in Minsk, Geneva and Vienna were unanimous in concluding that the Chernobyl disaster had devastating consequences both for people's health and for the environment. It was recognized that the long-term consequences of Chernobyl require careful study by scientists throughout the world. The long-term consequences, including genetic consequences, of the constant impact of low doses of radiation over many years have not been sufficiently studied. It will require more than one decade to study their impact on people and on the environment.

Evidence of our inadequate knowledge about the possible radiological consequences of such an accident is provided by the unprecedented increase in thyroid cancer among children in Belarus. That is why the State policy of the Republic of Belarus in mitigating and overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster is based on the long-term nature of its effects on human health and the state of the environment, and also on the socio-economic development of the affected territories.

The level of socio-psychological tension conditioned by the Chernobyl factor remains high in the polluted territories, but not only there. People still perceive the radiation risk as representing a serious danger to their health.

The problem of how to rehabilitate the affected regions is further complicated by an imbalance in the resident population structure and the serious shortage of qualified personnel, such as doctors, teachers and agricultural specialists. The exodus of such specialists from the area in the first years after the disaster was particularly marked. It is difficult to estimate the economic damage to Belarus caused by the Chernobyl disaster. Some 15 to 20 per cent of our total budget is devoted to dealing with its consequences every year. This is a huge burden, adding to the difficulties of implementing economic reforms.

General Assembly resolution 50/134, which was adopted by consensus, provided a political basis for revitalizing the bilateral and multilateral cooperation among donor countries, specialized agencies of the United Nations system and the States that suffered from the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

We deeply appreciate the work of the United Nations in coordinating international cooperation to deal with the consequences of the disaster, but at the same time we must note that the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/134 has been rather slow. In recent years, international assistance to affected States has substantially decreased, basically due to a lack of resources.

However, in this connection we would like to express our appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Akashi for his work in preparing for and carrying out the United Nations needs-assessment mission to the three affected countries in May this year. The result of that mission was an objective and unbiased assessment of the post-Chernobyl situation, which was reflected in the United Nations inter-agency programme of international assistance to the affected areas. Basically, that programme can be seen as a strategy for international Chernobyl cooperation in the second decade following the disaster. Tomorrow, 25 November, here at the United Nations, a conference of donors to strengthen the Chernobyl sarcophagus will take place, just a few days after the International Chernobyl Shelter Pledging Conference for Governments. These two events show how multifaceted the Chernoby! problems are and how active the United Nations has been in this area. They also demonstrate that the Organization is committed to the long-term study, mitigation and minimization of the consequences of the disaster. We trust that tomorrow's conference will yield positive results.

The areas affected present the following problems: the need for new jobs, the need to develop the infrastructure and the need for more investment in their economies.

As part of the new strategy for cooperation with donor countries, Belarus is willing to consider the question of new forms of cooperation: favourable terms for long-term credit, provision of equipment for specific purposes with extended terms for repayment and joint enterprises, as well as the possibility of providing tax relief to donor countries and special economic zones and the granting of concessions.

We are very grateful to all the countries and organizations that have provided technical and humanitarian assistance.

International assistance in dealing with the consequences of Chernobyl must be seen as a prerequisite for the countries involved to move ahead to sustainable development. One effective way of lending assistance in times of major disaster is to provide help that will lead to self-help, and this involves intensive socio-economic and ecological rehabilitation of the affected regions. Such an approach is fully in accordance with the models for sustainable development.

The representative of Ukraine, on behalf of the three affected countries, has introduced a draft resolution on strengthening international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

The Republic of Belarus believes that the draft resolution reflects the right approach to solving the problems through international cooperation. Its adoption will create the necessary conditions for implementing the inter-agency programme of international assistance to affected areas.

It is quite clear that this process requires the coordinating role of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The Department should develop a procedure for interaction between the United Nations system and the donor countries, the affected countries and non-governmental organizations using new forms of cooperation, including humanitarian and technical assistance, mutually beneficial economic cooperation in the regions affected by the disaster and a determination of procedures for choosing the best kinds of joint projects for providing assistance.

Only the Department of Humanitarian Affairs can properly coordinate international cooperation on the Chernobyl issue. It can help enhance the effectiveness of projects carried out by the specialized agencies and assist in streamlining procedures for actually choosing which projects to proceed with. Such an approach will mean a better division of labour among the specialized agencies of the United Nations and those responsible for actually carrying out the work.

We also feel that we should restore the earlier regulation which was used by the Quadripartite Ministerial-level Committee for Coordination on Chernobyl and the inter-agency assessment mission and that separate meetings should be held twice a year.

The Chernobyl disaster was indeed a terrible warning to the human race. Chernobyl made us understand that the earth is our common home — a truly beautiful speck of life and reason in the depths of the universe that has become extremely fragile in the hands of the human race, which has mastered the secret of the atom. The international community can now fully understand that it is only by working together against man-made and natural disasters that we can achieve a united world for the benefit of future generations.

Mr. Ayoub (Iraq) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: There is no doubt that the role of the United Nations and its specialized agencies is constantly growing in the provision and coordination of humanitarian and emergency assistance to refugees and countries that are victims of man-made and natural disasters.

The reports before us clearly set out the role that the United Nations has played and continues to play in this field in various places, such as Angola, Madagascar, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the countries of Central Africa, Lebanon, El Salvador, Djibouti, Tajikistan, the Sudan, Somalia and other countries.

Nonetheless, my delegation believes that the United Nations and the international community currently deal with the refugee problem in terms of its symptoms, not its deep-rooted causes and that is why this problem remains chronic and thus the considerable efforts and energies expended by the international community are wasted. We must therefore concentrate our efforts on the causes, such as poverty, armed conflicts, economic sanctions, economic imbalances, ethnic conflicts, environmental problems, desertification, deforestation, inadequate international cooperation and, above all, the problems of indebtedness, technology transfers, the provision of international financial aid to developing countries and the exploitation of basic resources and unfair terms of trade, all of which lead to greater flows of refugees across international borders, as the current international situation shows.

In this respect, my delegation notes that the High Commissioner for Refugees designates as refugees people who have left their countries because they are being persecuted for political reasons, or because of the insecurity and instability that prevail in their native lands. However, we do not think this definition reflects the actual situation for it does not take into account refugees who, due to the deterioration of economic conditions, are

compelled to leave their countries to seek better living conditions for themselves and their families. With regard to strengthening the role of the United Nations in this area, we believe that our Organization can make an effective contribution to resolving this problem, within its responsibilities for maintaining international peace and security, if it takes the following measures.

First, we need to generate and develop international solidarity and cooperation to prevent or limit conflicts, as they can lead to population displacement. Similarly, reconciliation should be fostered wherever possible, particularly in post-conflict situations, as part of continued efforts to find solutions.

Secondly, we have to emphasize neutrality and avoid the politicization of problems and generalizations when granting financial or humanitarian assistance to try to find humanitarian solutions, whether this is done directly, on the basis of governmental initiatives, or through humanitarian organizations.

Thirdly, the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Protocols should provide the legal framework for granting such international humanitarian assistance.

Fourthly, humanitarian assistance should be placed within the context of long-term development assistance, while taking due account of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States, and they should be consulted once it has been decided that assistance will be provided.

Fifthly, the United Nations must adopt an agenda for humanitarian assistance, just as it did with regard to peace and development.

Sixthly, consideration should be given to reforming the Security Council in a way that affirms the international character of the United Nations, in particular for the developing countries, and improving the Council's working methods to avoid abuse and promote the cause of international peace and security.

Seventhly, with regard to conflicts, we should place the emphasis on conflict prevention and try to find peaceful solutions to conflicts through measures that promote peace, such as development, justice and the democratization of international relations, and avoid adopting coercive measures, such as those set out in Chapter VII of the Charter. Such measures should be used only in very exceptional cases once all other options have been exhausted, including those based on regional arrangements or geographical considerations. If certain coercive measures, such as those set out in Chapter VII, have to be used, we must first make sure that the United Nations will not be used to further the foreign policy goals of some influential members of the Council. In this regard, I must emphasize the harmful effects of economic sanctions on displaced persons or refugees.

Once sanctions have been imposed, it is necessary to ensure respect for the principles decided on by the Sub-group on Sanctions of the Working Group of the General Assembly on "An Agenda for Peace". It is also necessary to ensure that the sanctions are in keeping with the Charter; that their objectives and the conditions for lifting them are clear; and that they do not cause humanitarian problems for the population as a whole. The country targeted by sanctions should know exactly what it must do for them to be lifted. Foodstuffs and medicines, along with agricultural and educational equipment, should not be restricted.

My country, Iraq, as the rest of the world is aware, has had an extremely bitter experience as a result of economic sanctions. The maintenance of the economic blockade has led to a shortage of foodstuffs and medicines and a decline in the living conditions of all Iraqis. Some of our people have had to leave the country and seek refuge elsewhere to improve their living conditions, hoping to return once sanctions have been lifted and living conditions have improved.

In the north of the country, conflicts between armed groups are being encouraged by certain Powers that are intervening directly by unilaterally imposing, outside the framework of the United Nations, no-fly zones, another reason for a mass exodus of Iraqi refugees to other countries. The ideal way to end their ordeal would be for other countries, including certain neighbouring countries, to stop interfering in the region's internal affairs. That would enable the State to play its role of ensuring security and stability, thus encouraging the refugees to return, knowing they will be safe.

Finally, through you, Sir, I would call on the international community and the United Nations to step up their efforts to lift the unjust economic embargo imposed on our country, so that it can create a suitable economic and social environment which will encourage the return of all the refugees who have been forced by the embargo to leave their country and families. We also call on the Organization to provide Iraq with development

assistance to rebuild its infrastructure, which was totally destroyed during the 1991 military aggression and by the embargo that, under all kinds of pretexts, continues to weigh heavily on us.

The Acting President: I would ask speakers to make statements at a pace that allows the interpreters to follow and interpret.

Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I should like to make an announcement concerning this agenda item, on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance.

I should like to remind delegations that, in view of the large number of draft resolutions expected under this item and the possible need to hold consultations on them with a view to reaching consensus, and as we are already approaching the end of November, members are strongly urged to submit those draft resolutions within the next few days, but not later than Monday, 1 December. I repeat that the deadline for submission of draft resolutions on this item is Monday, 1 December.

Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan) (*interpretation from Russian*): The recent review of the humanitarian reaction capacity of the United Nations system was urgently needed. It will help us introduce essential changes to increase the effectiveness of assistance provided under United Nations auspices in emergency situations. We hope that on the basis of the Secretary-General's proposals we will be able to work productively and take a significant decision on these issues at the next session of the General Assembly.

This issue is not simply academic; it is of the greatest practical significance for our country in particular, in particular, in view of the situation in Tajikistan since mid-1992. Despite considerable difficulties, our Government has done, and is doing, everything possible to deal with the humanitarian crisis which has enveloped the country as a result of internal conflict. However, these efforts would have fallen short but for the help given by outside friends and sympathizers. We are very grateful to all donors, including Governments, humanitarian agencies within the United Nations system, other international organizations and the many non-governmental organizations, charity and individual citizens. Their assistance helped mitigate the humanitarian situation resulting from the devastation, physical suffering and other ills that go hand in hand with civil strife and armed opposition.

We are grateful for the General Assembly's adoption on 5 May 1997 of resolution 51/30 J, which reflected the increased attention given by the international community to the trials and deprivations of the population of Tajikistan. The appeal, drafted jointly by United Nations organizations and institutions, dealing with the humanitarian needs of the Tajik population, made it possible to set clear priorities and determine how much outside help was urgently needed. On the whole, we were pleased with how donors reacted.

Our delegation has prepared, and will be presenting, a similar draft resolution on the question of humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan. We trust that it will receive a positive response and will be adopted at this session.

We would note in particular that the Government of Tajikistan has been moving forward to carry out the fundamental task on the agenda, namely, to restore peace and normalcy to our country as quickly as possible. On 27 June 1997, after three years of difficult and intensive negotiations, we were able to sign in Moscow the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan, which established a transitional period of 12 to 18 months for the implementation of all its provisions, including such issues as amnesty, mutual forgiveness, repatriation, reintegration of refugees, demobilization and reintegration of opposition fighters, the reform of government structures and various other legal and political issues.

We trust that the international community will not stand aside from our troubles but will continue to provide effective and targeted support as we seek to achieve our goals. Despite the importance of the General Agreement and the overall significantly improved situation with respect to compliance with the truce and the ceasefire, the humanitarian situation in our country is still difficult, as can be seen from the report of the Secretary-General in document A/52/500.

The food situation is of particular concern. According to estimates by the United Nations and others involved in humanitarian work in Tajikistan, this year the number of those requiring emergency food assistance exceeded 900,000, or one out of every six citizens, primarily old people, women and children.

Thanks to efforts by the World Food Programme, and also to donors such as the European Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross and a number of countries and non-governmental organizations, on the

whole we have been able to meet the minimum food needs of our people. However, next year, given the difficulties facing our national agricultural sector and the food sector as a whole, we will still need international food aid. The same applies to the vulnerable groups in our population. They will still need medicine, health services and other basic services, including restoration of the infrastructure, sanitation and the water supply.

We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's initiative of preparing an inter-agency appeal for humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan in 1998. We need emergency assistance, as well as help in rebuilding and rehabilitation. That is the only way in which we can come closer to lasting peace and ensure a fairly normal situation and economic development.

We are also hopeful about the donors' conference on Tajikistan currently taking place in Vienna with broad participation. We must rely on the understanding and solidarity of the international community for an appropriate response to the humanitarian needs of our country.

Our country shares the pain and suffering of other States where, as a result of conflict, natural disaster and other emergency situations, the people have the same dramatic needs as our own, and are forced to turn to the other peoples of the world for assistance and support. Great humanitarian efforts are being made by the United Nations in the Middle East, the Great Lakes region, Angola, Somalia, Djibouti, the Horn of Africa and the countries of Central America. We believe that we must also strengthen measures to ensure the security of humanitarian personnel working in the territories of those countries, with their consent.

We support the efforts made by various donors, and the ongoing coordination function of the United Nations with regard to international assistance in the post-Chernobyl period. We welcome the steps taken by the Secretary-General for new projects to rehabilitate the people and mitigate the consequences of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

We would hope that the lofty humanitarian mission of the United Nations will continue to be regarded as one of the top priorities of our Organization, and that it will be supported by all those who are not indifferent to human suffering and pain.

Mr. Awaad (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Egypt's statement under this agenda item will focus on sub-item (d), "Assistance to the Palestinian people". In this context, I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for the report contained in document A/52/159.

I am saying nothing new when I tell the Assembly about the assistance and support which the brotherly Palestinian people is receiving from the Government and people of Egypt. The Madrid Peace Conference of 1991 and the Oslo Accords of 1993, as well as subsequent accords, were important stages in the struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination. Egypt had to make whatever contribution it could to increase the ability of the Palestinian brothers to run their internal affairs and improve their economic situation, so as to benefit that brotherly people, which has suffered, and is still suffering, from the tyranny of occupation and all its collateral effects.

The need for that assistance and support remains urgent amid the current difficult circumstances faced by the Palestinian people of the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, in view of the stagnation of the peace process and Israeli coercive measures, including closures and restrictions on the movement of workers and commodities to and from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip which represent an additional burden increasing the suffering of the Palestinian people.

After the election of the Palestinian Authority, Egypt was quick to extend the necessary support to enable it to discharge its responsibilities. A national committee from all ministries of Egypt was established to specify the manner in which each would provide the appropriate assistance to the fledgling autonomous rule in Palestine. As a result, a number of agreements were signed with the Palestinian Authority, such as the agreements on postal service, transportation and education. A number of other agreements were also signed with a view to establishing institutional linkages between the organs of the fledgling Palestinian Authority and their Egyptian counterparts, which practically meant facilitation from the side of Egypt in the fields relating to the agreements which were signed.

Moreover, Egypt has also trained a large number of Palestinian police cadres who have constituted the nucleus of a Palestinian police force that is carrying out its national task with strict discipline and efficiency. Similarly, Egypt has lent its expertise to the officials selected by the Palestinian Authority to speak on its

behalf abroad and to defend the Palestinian cause in all States and international forums. Egypt is also attempting to join with other parties in any form of tripartite cooperation to lend technical assistance to Palestinians in all areas. In this regard, I would refer to the agreement between Egypt, Norway and the Palestinian Authority to train personnel in the nursing profession with a view to rectifying the shortage which the Palestinian National Authority faces in this field. Egypt is also cooperating with the Palestinian Authority in planning and implementing the construction of the port at Gaza with a view to its becoming an important commercial link for the Palestinian people with the outside world.

In another context, and at the level of the private sector, Egyptian businessmen have not held back initiating a number of economic projects with their Palestinian counterparts designed to enhance the efficiency of the Palestinian economy and save it from the consequences of the destructive closures imposed on it at random by Israel. Egypt's role is not confined to the extension of moral and material support and assistance in kind. Egypt is also exerting every effort and through all means to urge all friendly States to increase their assistance and to abide by their commitments to the Palestinian National Authority in order that the Palestinian leadership will be able to realize the aspirations of the Palestinian people, who have suffered so long the scourges of war, displacement and repression. It is high time for the Palestinian people to harvest the fruits of peace.

In this connection, I should like to commend the important role played by the United Nations, the Secretary-General and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as all specialized agencies and organs in providing the necessary support to the Palestinian people. We commend specifically the role played by the Special Coordinator. We hereby, and within this framework, call for increased coordination among all United Nations and international organs, donor countries and the Palestinian Authority. All these entities have affirmed, in all symposiums and conferences held on the provision of economic assistance to the Palestinian people, renewed willingness to enhance their support to the Palestinian Authority on the basis of specific priorities to implement necessary development activities.

In this connection, we salute the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), particularly the initiatives taken by its High Commissioner, whether directly or within the international framework provided by the Agency to channel economic and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people.

Egypt hopes that, with the assistance and contributions provided by all of us, the Palestinian people will take their first steps towards economic and social development. Egypt appeals to the world's States to fulfil their commitments to extend assistance. Similarly, we call upon those States that have not yet extended assistance in this respect to consider doing so, and generously, in order to realize that noble objective of serving peace in the entire Middle East and of benefitting a people trying valiantly to establish its State on its own territory.

Mr. Bull (Liberia): At the outset, my delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (A/52/678) of 13 November 1997 on the post-conflict humanitarian situation in Liberia and the efforts that are being undertaken by the Government of Liberia, in collaboration with the United Nations, regional and subregional organizations and intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies, to move the country along the continuum of normalcy, assistance, recovery and development.

Our commendation also goes to Mr. Yasushi Akashi, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and his able staff for their coordination of relief and humanitarian activities in Liberia. Since Mr. Akashi is to retire shortly, my delegation wishes to join previous speakers in paying a deserved tribute to him for his leadership and outstanding contribution to the work of the Organization. We wish him well in his future undertakings.

After seven years of civil conflict, Liberia faces the formidable challenge of rebuilding its infrastructure and reviving its economy. The Government is also concerned about several hundred thousand of its nationals who remain as refugees in neighbouring countries awaiting repatriation. The internally displaced require resettlement, and ex-combatants, including a significant number of child soldiers, must be rehabilitated so as to become productive members of civil society.

The successful holding of presidential and legislative elections on 19 July 1997 has renewed the hope of the Liberian people that the unfavourable effects of the war will soon be addressed. A duly elected civilian Government under the leadership of President Charles

Ghankay Taylor has formulated and is striving to implement pragmatic policies to promote national reconciliation and unity, economic revival and durable peace. The Government believes that the full participation of all Liberians is a necessary condition for the achievement of economic recovery and political stability.

It has identified those sectors that require priority attention, such as food and nutrition, electricity and water supply, and health and sanitation. Revitalization of the subsistence agricultural sector, from which about 70 per cent of the population derives its livelihood, is also a focal point in the recovery process.

As regards its national economic plan, the Government has maintained a free-enterprise system and is encouraging development of the private sector as one of the primary vehicles for economic growth. In the public sector, it has emphasized fiscal discipline, public accountability and transparency in the management of resources. Since the installation of the new Government, revenue collection in the country has steadily improved. Teams from both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have made several visits to Liberia, and we are encouraged by their initial assessment. It is my Government's hope that favourable consideration will be given to its request that some of its external debts be forgiven.

In order to sustain a culture of peace in Liberia, as well as to meet the difficult challenges of reconstruction and development, the Government has requested the Secretary-General to establish a United Nations peace-building support office in Liberia. The Government notes with deep appreciation that the Secretary-General has accepted its request and is moving as expeditiously as possible to establish this important office in the country.

My delegation wishes to thank the international community and donor Governments for the sustained humanitarian assistance provided to Liberia during its civil war. As the transition is made from relief to the resumption of normal development activities, it is necessary that Liberia be provided continued assistance in order to help consolidate peace in the country.

It is against this background that the African Group — through its Chairman, the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Lesotho — has submitted a draft resolution entitled "Assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Liberia". That draft resolution requests the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to mobilize all possible assistance within the United Nations system to help the Government of Liberia in its reconstruction and development, as well as to undertake as soon as possible, in collaboration with the Government of Liberia, an overall assessment of needs, with the objective of holding a donors' conference for the reconstruction and development of Liberia. It is my delegation's hope that the draft resolution will be unanimously adopted by the General Assembly and that all friendly Governments will participate in the forthcoming donors' conference, which will be held in Geneva in February of next year.

Finally, my delegation is in agreement with the Secretary-General's assessment that the humanitarian situation in Liberia has substantially improved following the installation of a constitutionally elected Government. However, much remains to be done in order to ensure durable peace, stability and development in Liberia. While reaffirming my Government's commitment to meet the needs and aspirations of its people, I, and my country, hope that we can continue to rely on the support of the international community.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and resolution 43/177 of 15 December 1988, I now call on the Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Jilani (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express, on behalf of my delegation, our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/52/159. We would also would like to express our deep gratitude for the efforts of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan, and for the key role played by the Office of the Special Coordinator in facilitating and coordinating the activities of the United Nations institutions through effective action in the field.

The Palestinian people deeply appreciate the efforts of the international community to help them succeed in their struggle and to face the new challenge confronting them as they work to build their country and its institutions under the current difficult conditions. Similarly, we would like to express our deep appreciation to the international community for the initiatives it has undertaken to save the peace process and to achieve tangible progress at all levels. Such progress would have a positive impact on the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people.

In this context, we would like to express our gratitude to all the States and organizations that provide

assistance to the Palestinian people. It is our great hope to see the international community honour its commitments to help the Palestinian people restore their economy, which has been destroyed, and to lessen the impact of Israeli policies on the living conditions of our people.

The basic message that emerges from the Secretary-General's report that we have before us is that the infrastructures of all the vital sectors have been destroyed. Indeed, the occupation authorities have completely neglected them for three decades. The occupation authorities continue to collect exorbitant taxes from the Palestinian people and to plunder their natural resources, yet, according to the report, from 1970 to 1992 they spent $15 per inhabitant for infrastructure in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as opposed to $1,500 per Israeli inhabitant — which is 100 times more. And we have not even mentioned the policies and measures imposed by the Israeli Government since 1993.

These truths are reflected in the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/ES-10/6, which was submitted in accordance with resolution ES-10/2 of the General Assembly. Allow me to quote the following paragraph:

> "The realization of the principle of territorial integrity, as enunciated in the Oslo accords, has been frustrated during the period under review by Israeli restrictions on the movement of persons and goods between so-called A, B, and C areas of the West Bank, between Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and between the occupied territories and the outside world. Safe passage arrangements have not been established, and arrangements for a Gaza seaport and airport have not been agreed upon. The Israeli policy of general closure, which has been in effect since 30 March 1993, imposes explicit restrictions on the mobility of goods and persons. There are fixed Israeli checkpoints on Palestinian roads, including key transport routes, and a system of differentiated mandatory permits for labourers, business people, medical personnel and patients, students, religious worshippers, and all other categories of Palestinians. Restrictions on entry to Jerusalem block access to the main north-south transportation route in the West Bank, necessitating lengthy and costly detours. This general closure has been aggravated by periodic comprehensive closures entailing the complete denial of such movements during a full 353 calendar days between 30 March 1993 and mid-June 1997." [A/ES-10/6, para. 22]

The report goes on to say in the same paragraph:

> "Israeli restrictions on the movement of goods and personnel are also imposed on United Nations officials and project materials, resulting in delays and added costs for development projects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and in serious disruption of the work of humanitarian agencies." [*ibid.*]

These extremely serious policies and practices not only violate the agreements reached; they also reflect the Israeli Government's policy of vengeance on and collective and arbitrary punishment of the Palestinian people. Such policies and practices cannot be justified by security concerns. The international community has already condemned them. Economic and living conditions in the Palestinian territories are continually deteriorating. Indeed, the economy's performance has worsened, the average Palestinian income has fallen significantly and unemployment has reached a very high level. This, in turn, aggravates the economic and political problems.

These deteriorating living conditions and the frustration with the peace process arising from the new Israeli Government's policies have made it almost impossible to discuss cooperation or the peace process. On several occasions, we have warned the Israeli Government immediately to abandon its policy of collective reprisals, closures, blockades and unjust restrictions. We must give up any hope of successful regional cooperation and economic cooperation conferences so long as the Palestinian economy is being destroyed and the peace process undermined. The failure of the most recent conference on economic cooperation speaks eloquently in that respect.

Israel's respect for agreements reached and for their implementation, its abidance by international law, and an end to its policy of blockade and collective reprisals are all *sine qua non* conditions for saving the peace process, ensuring its success and alleviating the suffering and improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 45/6 of 16 October 1990, I now call on the observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mrs. Junot (International Committee of the Red Cross) (*interpretation from French*): In recent years, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has closely followed the debate on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance and welcomes this renewed opportunity to share a few thoughts on this topic. We are convinced that strengthening coordination among the various humanitarian organizations, both in field operations and in the conceptual approach to them, is essential if they are fully to achieve their objectives.

The ICRC is particularly concerned with emergency situations arising from armed conflict and internal violence, which are often marked by widespread and urgent needs among the civilian population and by the breakdown of political, economic and civic institutions. Such situations require humanitarian organizations to harmonize their responses and avoid any duplication of efforts. Coordination should aim at carefully orchestrating the conduct of different types of activity, over time and in a frequently volatile and rapidly changing environment. It should be instrumental in broadening the impact of humanitarian efforts and in ensuring the best use of donor funding.

The ICRC believes that humanitarian action, on which the fate of many thousands of people often depends, requires proper assessment and planning, professional management and constant evaluation. Humanitarian organizations involved in emergency response therefore need to recognize their interdependence. Inappropriate behaviour or lack of professionalism on the part of some can adversely affect the efforts undertaken by others. It can, moreover, lead to a dangerous lowering of standards in humanitarian aid.

In this connection, we shall refer briefly to the issue of security of humanitarian workers. The growing risks to which humanitarian organizations have been exposed in recent years are undoubtedly due to changing realities in the pattern and conduct of warfare. These risks have been further compounded by the proliferation of aid agencies with divergent objectives and different working methods. Warring parties often view the humanitarian world as a whole, without distinguishing between the various organizations; in other words, if one agency offends them, all may be affected by the consequences. The security of all the organizations thus depends on the security of each. Proper coordination and compliance with common fundamental principles can undoubtedly help to improve the safety of humanitarian personnel.

Here, we should like to highlight the importance of codes of conduct and terms of reference which seek to regulate the way in which humanitarian operations are carried out, specify the conditions attached to the provision of relief and establish minimum standards that ought to be universally applied. In 1993, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement adopted a code of conduct which has since been endorsed by over 100 non-governmental organizations and which was welcomed by consensus by the representatives of 142 Governments at the most recent International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. This code is one attempt to set universal, practical and professional standards in emergency operations and to address the issues of ethics and accountability.

The ICRC wishes to stress its full commitment to take part in United Nations coordination efforts. It recognizes the need to strengthen appropriate United Nations-led coordination mechanisms, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Its participation in these mechanisms is, on the one hand, prompted by its concern to achieve the greatest possible complementarity between its own efforts and those of the United Nations and humanitarian organizations; and, on the other, conditioned by its determination to fulfil its special role as an independent and neutral intermediary in situations of armed conflict, which is enshrined in the Geneva Conventions.

Apart from its contribution to the work of United Nations coordination mechanisms, the ICRC has also been pursuing a bilateral dialogue with United Nations agencies and bodies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as some of the major non-governmental organizations involved in emergency situations or humanitarian advocacy. The objective of this dialogue is to enhance mutual understanding and strengthen sectoral coordination and cooperation.

For many years, the ICRC has played a major role in coordinating humanitarian endeavours in the field. It did so, for example, in Cambodia in the early 1980s together with UNICEF, in Somalia in the early 1990s, and more recently in the Russian Federation, in Chechnya, until the brutal murder of six of its field

personnel — mostly medical staff from national Red Cross Societies — forced it to withdraw last December. The ICRC currently plays a leading role in conflict areas — in Afghanistan and Sierra Leone, for instance — and in the domain of protection and emergency relief for internally displaced persons in Colombia and Sri Lanka.

The ICRC is willing to assume field coordination responsibilities, and is prepared to do so, on a pragmatic and voluntary basis and without prejudice to its specific mandate, particularly in places where it is de facto the main humanitarian organization in place. The ICRC already coordinates the relief efforts of national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and their Federation in conflict situations, pursuant to the statutes of the movement. In all its operations the ICRC attempts to reach victims of the conflict on all sides, with the consent of the parties involved.

We should also point out that in some countries, such as Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan, national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies play an invaluable role, particularly in strengthening local mechanisms for coping with emergencies. Furthermore, in a transition period such as we are currently experiencing in the former Yugoslavia, national Societies from other countries are increasingly involved in achieving the ICRC's goals by implementing rehabilitation projects.

Besides recognizing the need to strengthen coordination between aid agencies, the ICRC considers it essential to further enhance consultation and cooperation between humanitarian organizations and political bodies. Such interaction should lead to a more precise division of tasks and responsibilities between the humanitarian organizations that are working to alleviate human suffering and the political entities whose primary duty it is to tackle the root causes of conflict and to restore conditions for peace and stability.

The ICRC finds it encouraging that over the past few years humanitarian issues have been given greater prominence on the agendas of political bodies such as the United Nations Security Council, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Non-Aligned Movement. This is clearly reflected in the increasing openness of these bodies and their interest in direct interaction with humanitarian organizations.

Despite the constructive dialogue which has taken place in many forums and brought together humanitarian and political bodies, the ICRC notes with growing concern that there is a tendency, particularly in Central Africa, to resort to humanitarian action as a substitute for political and military action. But let us be quite clear on this point: when violence, as the expression of a deliberate policy, reaches such a pitch that the survival of entire populations is at stake, the response to crises cannot be limited to humanitarian action. Massacres and genocide, which are above all political crimes, can be effectively combated only through political and, if necessary, military action.

Therefore, ICRC can only hope that States and the United Nations will not concentrate on humanitarian action alone in certain areas of the world, while neglecting political responses to conflicts. It is convinced that humanitarian action should complement, rather than replace, political action and, where needed, peace-keeping or peace-enforcement operations.

If the provision of humanitarian aid becomes, or is perceived to be, conditional on the behaviour of warring parties, or if it is entirely linked to political objectives, that will lead to situations in which some victims "deserve" protection and assistance more than others. For the ICRC this would of course be intolerable, calling into question the very essence of its humanitarian approach.

Furthermore, if humanitarian aid is used to promote foreign policy objectives, it may become a contributory factor in increasing the vulnerability of representatives of humanitarian organizations. The security of personnel depends, to some extent at least, on the way in which combatants perceive humanitarian action. In practical terms, if combatants see a humanitarian organization as a factor likely to influence the course of the conflict, or if they view it as a symbol of what they are fighting against, they may try to harm it in some way, and its personnel thus become easy targets.

The ICRC is convinced that humanitarian agencies and political leaders should engage even more than in the past in a regular and far-reaching dialogue. It is therefore paying increasing attention to its interaction with regional and global political bodies, and recognizes the need to be proactive in matters involving humanitarian diplomacy. In this connection, we should like to mention the ICRC's convening of a humanitarian forum in Wolfsberg, Switzerland, to examine the growing challenges in this

field. Some 70 high-level representatives of donor Governments and humanitarian organizations participated. The forum was a follow-up to the humanitarian summit organized by the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) in Madrid in December 1995. The ICRC intends to pursue this dialogue and convene a similar forum next year.

We should also like to mention that, at the invitation of the Belgian Government, an international symposium focusing on the relationship between humanitarian action and political-military action is scheduled to take place in Brussels in February 1998.

Another important event will be the first periodic meeting on international humanitarian law which the Swiss Government, as the depositary of the Geneva Conventions, is convening in January 1998. The meeting will essentially deal with armed conflicts linked to the disintegration of State structures and the issue of respect for and protection of humanitarian personnel.

The response to the challenges ahead will depend on the international community's ability and will to find comprehensive solutions to humanitarian problems. Such solutions must incorporate the political, social and economic elements without which humanitarian aid can accomplish little of lasting value.

Mr. Pedersen (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies welcomes again the opportunity to share a few observations on this important agenda item on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance.

At the heart of the coordination debate is, in our opinion, a concern for the quality and effectiveness with which we in the international community respond to the suffering of those caught up in catastrophe and conflict. In this respect, we applaud the proposal of the Secretary-General for the new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator within the United Nations system, which recognizes not only the need for more pragmatic coordination among operating United Nations bodies but also the equally vital need for coordination between policy development, crisis response and diplomacy. We believe the plans for the new Office demonstrate an understanding that humanitarian efforts which deal with the consequences of crisis are no substitute for political action to address its causes and cessation. In this context, the International Federation is keen to see a strong role continue for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as one of the few forums that brings together United Nations and non-United Nations humanitarian agencies.

Within the disaster-response community, the concern for quality of response is growing fast and generating a number of exciting practical endeavours. Three years ago, the Federation, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and some international non-governmental organizations, launched the code of conduct for relief agencies and workers. This is a 10-point code of behaviour which seeks to safeguard the independence of agencies and to ensure that their motivation is humanitarian rather than political or commercial. It talks about a relationship between aid workers and beneficiaries which respects human dignity and local capacities. It emphasizes the need for transparency in our dealings and accountability to our supporters.

The code has now been endorsed by some 131 international non-governmental organizations, including all of the major agencies commonly seen operating in today's complex emergencies. At the most recent International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference in 1995, 147 Governments welcomed the code and pledged their support to making it work. Tangible evidence of this support can now be seen in many donor countries, where the code is being used as a yardstick against which to judge agency suitability for funding and competence of implementation. Host Governments are starting to use it as a way of ensuring the quality of agencies entering their country, either directly or by encouraging in-country, non-governmental organization coordinating bodies to use it. It is becoming an accepted standard. Agencies are expected to behave in this way, and their peers, the media and their donors are starting to question behaviour which does not come up to this standard — proof, we think, that self-policing and steady pushing for high standards achieves results where quick-fix solutions and imposed regulations fail.

In an exciting new development, the International Federation, non-governmental organizations, church agencies and the ICRC — which between them are the end-point deliverers of some 95 per cent of international humanitarian assistance — have come together to develop a second-generation code which will lay down minimal performance criteria for independent agencies and will define, for the first time, both a universal best practice for agencies and the quantity and quality of assistance disaster victims have a right to expect from assistance

agencies. This work, dubbed the "Sphere project", supported by United Nations operational agencies and funded by non-governmental organizations and donor Governments, aims to produce an international set of field-applicable standards by the middle of next year. We believe that this major initiative marks a key turning point in the quality of both the accountability and service that independent agencies are committed to giving, and will make a significant contribution to coordination among such agencies.

Coordination is not an issue only within the humanitarian community. More than 11 years ago, the explosion in reactor number 4 at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant created a new category of disaster. Dealing with that disaster — which we are still dealing with today — requires a new form of cooperation. A large number of people have been affected, sometimes in neighbouring countries, and the enormous economic impact will for decades place a burden on the affected communities. In addition to the now-past acute emergency needs, long-term health consequences are starting to appear. Because of their scope and magnitude, such disasters require an innovative and multi-disciplinary approach — hence the need for close cooperation and coordination between the various technical, scientific and humanitarian agencies involved. Long-term commitment of donors is needed, and the Federation actively lobbies for this. Throughout the process, from relief to rehabilitation, the Federation is committed to keeping humanitarian needs on the agenda as well as advocating economic and technical solutions.

We believe that the most effective way to ensure the success of such a programme is to involve the affected communities in both its planning and development. In this regard, the Federation is advocating an increasing mobilization of local resources, as external support will, we are fully aware, progressively phase out.

If we move to a more recent crisis, the joint International Federation-North Korean Red Cross relief operation demonstrates the effectiveness of coordination between independent humanitarian organizations and the value of promoting understanding and cooperation between independent organizations and affected national Governments. Our relief operation, which began in the autumn of 1995, entered a new phase as of July of this year, when it was expanded to provide health and nutritional support to some 2.6 million people in the country. The current operation provides food aid to the most vulnerable people and assistance to the country's failing health sector. The latter is a role which will grow as other agencies, notably the World Food Programme, become more active in the food sector.

On the other side of the world, our operations in the Great Lakes area of Africa demonstrate the value of a regional approach, linking local Red Cross societies in the region and linking relief to disaster preparedness and community development. The enormous population movements following the 1994 Rwanda massacres have deeply affected all countries in the Great Lakes region, either by forcing them to care for hundreds of thousands of refugees or by fuelling existing conflicts.

The National Societies of the Great Lakes countries, with the support of their Federation, have made tremendous efforts to support their local communities and authorities in coping with this crisis. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Tanzania, Red Cross Societies have taken care of hundreds of thousands of refugees in the Goma, Bukavu and Ngara camps. In Rwanda, a rebuilt National Society gives support to large groups of fellow citizens who have managed to escape death during the massacres. In Uganda, the National Society assists Rwandan refugees. From the beginning, the Societies of the region and the Federation had committed themselves to continue their support beyond the emergency situation.

In conclusion, for the Federation, our modus operandi is always to provide assistance through our local membership, using the opportunity of relief programmes to upgrade skills, pass on knowledge and promote a concern for issues of development and conflict mitigation. Better and more universal standards in assistance, the exploring of new relationships between independent agencies and Governments, and close cooperation with United Nations organizations are all of vital concern to us.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision taken earlier at this meeting, I call now on the observer of Switzerland.

Mr. Staehelin (Switzerland) (*interpretation from French*): The Swiss delegation is grateful for this opportunity to address the item on the coordination of humanitarian activities, a matter to which my Government attaches great importance.

I wish first to express our satisfaction at the recent appointment of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello as United

Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, an excellent choice by which the Secretary-General is sending a very clear signal to the international community about the importance he attaches to the new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Switzerland believes that humanitarian coordination should be a priority for the new Coordinator's Office, and in that connection we should like to draw attention to four points. First, humanitarian coordination involves two elements: the Emergency Relief Coordinator has the duty to meet the coordination needs both of the international humanitarian community and of field operations, and he must also ensure optimal coordination within the United Nations system by taking into account the political, military and development aspects of humanitarian activities. The structure of the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator will have to reflect the need to carry out these two tasks with a view to ensuring the optimal functioning of humanitarian coordination.

Secondly, the machinery for the dissemination of information and for decision-making in the area of humanitarian coordination must operate as effectively as possible. The Secretary-General's decision to strengthen the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as the main consultative — and, we hope, decision-making — body is certainly a major step in that direction. But we fear that centralizing activities in the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator could create too wide a gap between the machinery for the dissemination of information and for decision-making on the one hand and the main humanitarian agencies operating in Europe on the other. Here, it is essential to ensure that the future structure makes the best possible use of the respective advantages of each of the United Nations headquarters sites. Specifically, we must maintain the complementarity and coherence between New York's responsibility for political and military affairs and Geneva's responsibility for interagency operational questions in the humanitarian sphere. The same is true for the process of consolidated interagency appeals for funds.

Thirdly, in keeping with the logic of reform of the humanitarian sector, the transfer to the United Nations Development Programme of responsibility for training in disaster prevention and management should include only the operational aspects of these responsibilities. The actual coordination of the management of disaster response should remain among the functions of the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, in accordance with resolution 48/162. We consider that, for reasons of efficiency and with a view to achieving synergy, these functions should remain close to the agencies and organizations with the operational mandates for humanitarian protection and relief, especially the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and the large number of relevant non-governmental organizations.

Finally, we think that the Secretary-General's recommendation that a humanitarian-affairs segment be established within the Economic and Social Council is a first, positive step towards better "governance" in the humanitarian sphere. For its part, Switzerland is interested in participating in future discussions on the modalities of such a segment and indeed in participating in a governance body such as that suggested by the Secretary-General.

I wish now to mention a problem that concerns us all: the precarious security situation of humanitarian personnel in the field. The increasing number of serious incidents, even deliberate attacks aimed at humanitarian personnel, is intolerable. In our view, the international community must consider the best way to promote the safety of those who are committed to helping those who are most in need. As the depositary of the Geneva Conventions, Switzerland feels it bears a special responsibility with respect to the implementation of international humanitarian law. Thus, it gladly accepted the mandate of the twenty-sixth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent to organize periodic meetings to consider general problems of implementing international humanitarian law, and is pleased that the safety of humanitarian personnel will be a principal item on the agenda of the first of these meetings. We hope that all the States parties to the Geneva Conventions will participate actively in the meeting, which will be held at Geneva in January 1998.

I wish in conclusion to reaffirm the support of Switzerland for the Secretary-General's recent decisions in the humanitarian sphere, and for the new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, with which we expect to work very productively.

The Acting President: Action on the draft resolutions already submitted under this item, and on those to be submitted, will be taken at a later date to be announced.

The meeting rose at 7.10 p.m.